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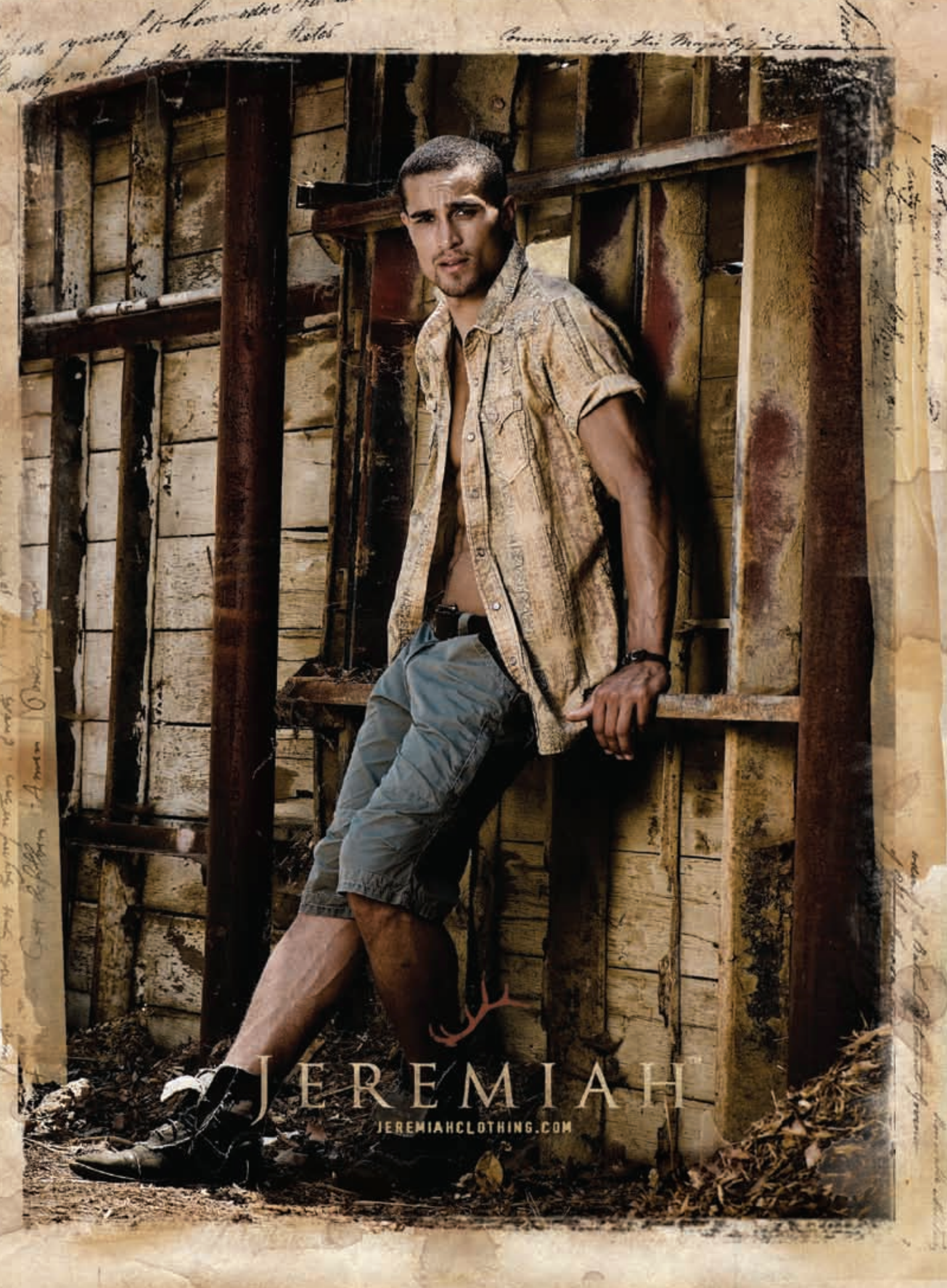
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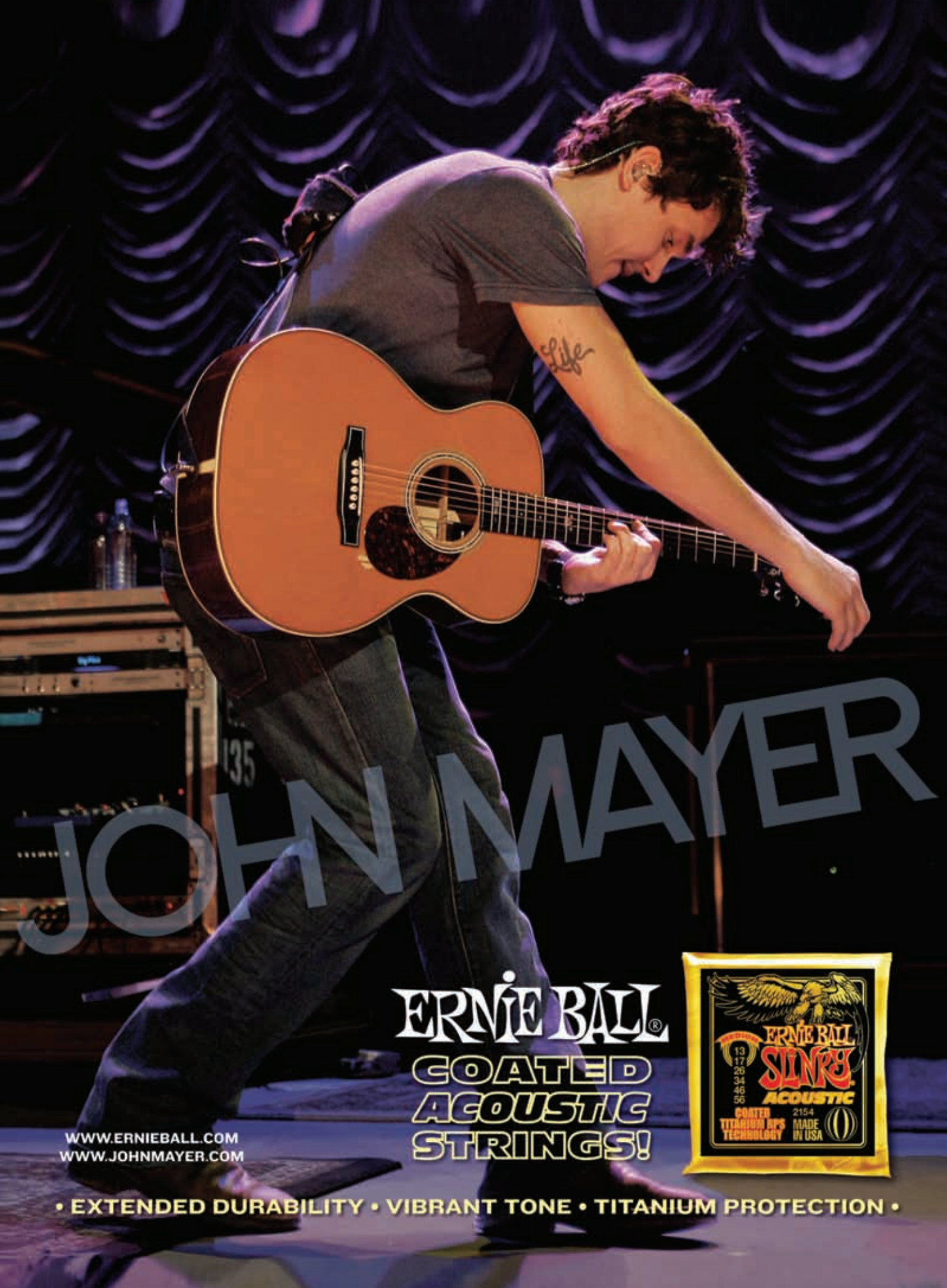
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Reviews of films including *Killshot, The Class* and *Notorious* (pictured above); new albums from Phosphorescent, The Gourds, Franz Nicolay and other artists; and video games *Sonic Unleashed* and *Call of Duty: World at War.*

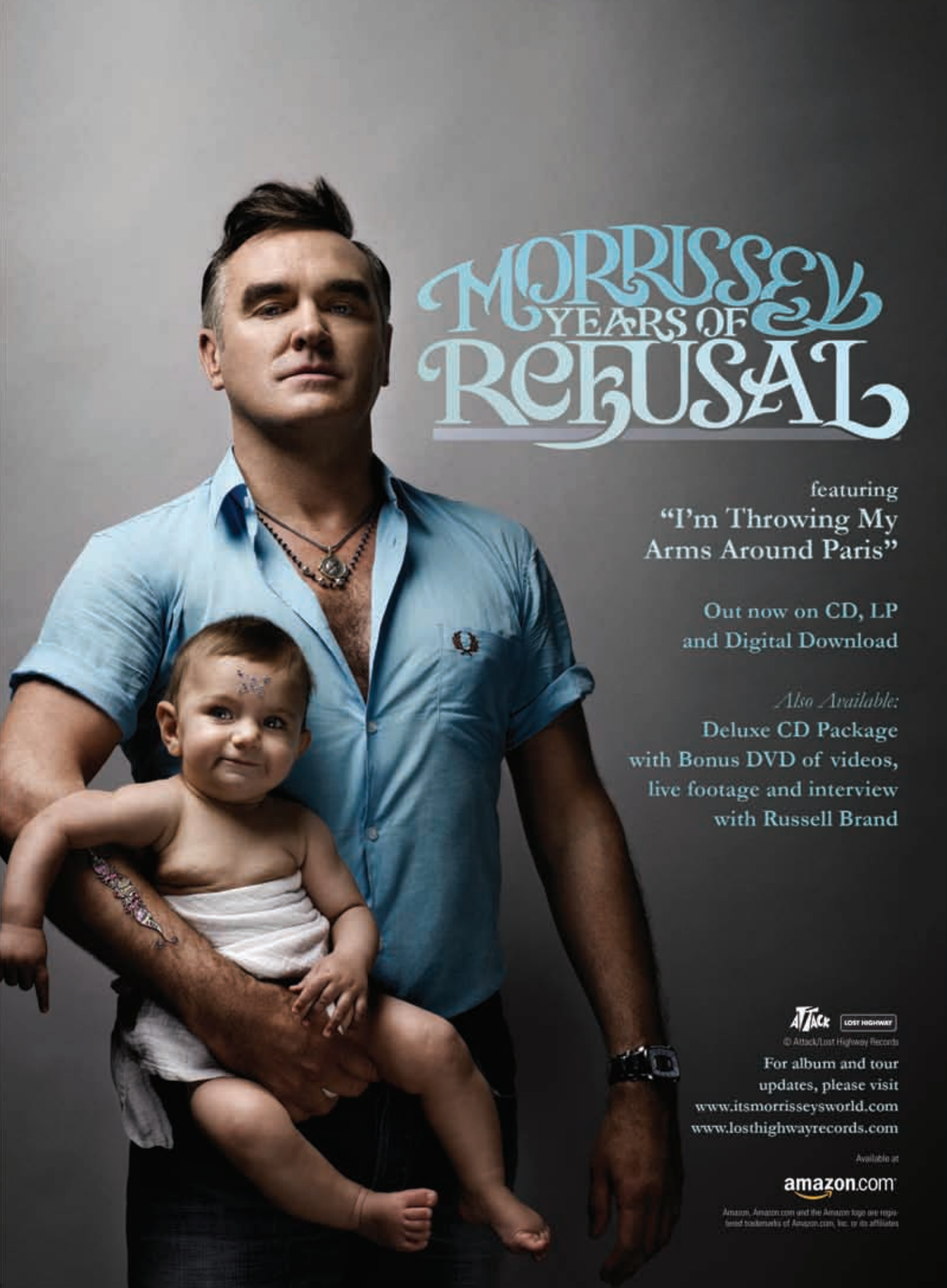
Live performances from My Brightest Diamond, Erin McCarley, Neil Halstead, Ponderosa (clockwise from top) and more.

Add your own user rating to anything reviewed in this issue!

Plus, Grimey's Grammy picks, the most egregious Grammy shafts, a celebration of *Paste*'s favorite nominees, and more awards-season coverage.

ONLINE Throughout the magazine, this symbol denotes additional content online. Visit **PASTEMAGAZINE.COM/February09.**

Notorious Photo by Phil Caruso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EDITORIAL

BY JOSH JACKSON

GREATER LOVE HAS NO MAGAZINE THAN THIS

The ancient Greeks had several words that can be translated as "love," but three were most commonly used. *Eros* refers to the romantic love celebrated Feb. 14 and found in 97 percent of all popular music. *Agape* is the New Testament word Jesus used when he said, "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends." That leaves the much-overlooked *philia*, which can mean both, "I love the way my son refers to the dawn as 'when the world started over'" and "I love the way Arcade Fire begins 'Wake Up.'" This word connotes a deep sense of cherishing a person or object. For our 50th Issue Lovefest, it's all *philia*, all the time.

Scattered throughout the issue, we've asked the artists we cover to tell us what they cherish. The answers range from animated film *The Point* (Beatbeat Whisper) to Fugazi (David Bazan) to Asian Punk Boy (Michael Stipe). Elsewhere, photographer Jayme Thornton captures five artists with their favorite instruments ("Objects of Their Affection," pg. 42). And our cover subject, the always culturally curious Neko Case, reflects on more than a few of her favorite things ("Neko Case Drives Us Batty," pg. 34). Turns out, she's a fan of Nick Cave, *Hobby Farms* magazine and a classic John Hughes film.

It's been our pleasure, over these last 50 issues, to share with you many of our favorite things. That's what *Paste* is about, really—spending our days listening to music, watching movies and TV, playing video games, reading books, testing out gadgets, drinking really great beer and telling you about the best of it all. Don't hate us for loving our jobs. This *is* the Lovefest after all, so join us instead. Visit PasteMagazine.com/Lovefest and turn us on to some of your favorite things. We'll keep a running blog with artists, readers and writers all chiming in about the stuff that makes our time here on Earth more enjoyable. We hope your life is filled with *agape* and *eros*. And we feel it's our duty to ensure it's filled with objects of *philia*.

Paste

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(BUT SUBSCRIBERS CAN STILL GET A CD) SEE P. 32 FOR DETAILS

We all want to do our part to lessen our impact on the environment. A recent survey of *Paste* subscribers revealed that ***68% of you would prefer*** to take your monthly *Paste* Sampler as a secure download. If you'd still prefer to get the physical CD, no problem—see p. 32 for details. Additionally, if you would prefer to receive the magazine itself in digital form, you can do that, too. Just find your subscriber number on your mailing label and head to pastemagazine.com/green to sign up! New to *Paste*? You can head to pastemagazine.com/green, too!

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INBOX

TOP 5 ULTERIOR MOTIVES ATTRIBUTED TO *PASTE*'S SELECTION OF SHE & HIM'S *VOLUME ONE* AS ALBUM OF THE YEAR IN LETTERS TO THE EDITOR AND COMMENTS ON OUR WEBSITE:

5. We get off on giving the honor to non-deserving artists.
4. We wanted to put a pretty girl on the cover.
3. Quaaludes.
2. We were paid off.
1. We hoped that by bestowing the honor upon She & Him, Zooey Deschanel would respond with sexual favors (not sure if the commenter meant for all of us, just the men or a single representative of *Paste*).

WRONG SHE & HIM

You folks clearly missed the boat on selecting the goofy, amateurish She & Him as your Album of the Year while completely overlooking the other she & him: Deb Talan and Steve Tannen of The Weepies. *Hideaway* is a masterpiece of melodic folk/pop, understated yet sophisticated songwriting and sincere, personal vocals. The Weepies' self-production is brilliant in its simplicity, and their vocal harmonies are rich and often alluringly unorthodox. Hey, Zooey takes a cute photo, but her lifeless vocals and their shallow, campfire sing-along songs (and bad Beatles cover!) are hardly the stuff of Album of the Year accolades from a magazine with *Paste*'s stature.

CHARLES HORTON { Nashville }

BUT IN THE MORNING, MISS, WE WILL BE SOBER

No Portishead on your Top 50 list for 2008? Srsly? Y'all are drunk.

CANDICE JONES { via email }

DON'T MESS WITH TEXAS

Great job on Denton, Texas, and a really nice thing for a deserving city. I was pleased to see several of my faves in that list of bands.

HUNTER HAUK, ENTERTAINMENT EDITOR, *QUICK* { Dallas }

Just received the year-end print edition, and I am appalled. That you could print a piece on the music scene in Denton with nary a mention of Will Johnson's Centro-matic and South San Gabriel is pretty shocking. These are exactly the kind of bands *Paste* should be supporting. You folks obviously have no idea what you're missing.

JAY COOPER { via email }

ED—While we only listed 10 bands in the magazine, the extended list at PasteMagazine.com/December08 does indeed include Centro-matic/South San Gabriel, bands Paste *has been covering for years. We've even published several of Will Johnson's haikus about speedy baseball player Rickey Henderson, including this gem:*

No one to talk to?
Maybe talk to yourself now
In the third person

Paste

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INBOX

"I feel good knowing that I'm keeping things green by viewing onscreen."

TV TRANSGRESSIONS

I was excited to see that you included a TV section in your Best of 2008 list. I'm not a huge television fan, but the few shows I watch, I adore. However, I was disappointed to see both *The Colbert Report* and *The Daily Show* make your list. Top 10 TV Shows and two of them so closely related?! With so much programming out there, I felt the lack of creativity and exploration saddening. I was seriously hoping for *It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia* to make your list. It's one of the best shows I've watched in a long time. Otherwise, though, thanks so much. I've been a subscriber since I was about 15 or 16 (I'm 22 now), and you've never let me down. As a full-time art student, I never have much free time for finding music. Your magazine allows me to read up on things before I purchase or download and saves me time searching.
CAROLINE GARDNER { Philadelphia }

I can't find much fault with your selections for music bests (you could have included Johnny Flynn and Bob Dylan) but your TV selections leave me wondering if you have a clue. *Lost*? *Project Runway*? *Pushing Daisies*? Where the heck are *Breaking Bad* and *True Blood*? What can we expect for next year? *Dancing With the ex-Stars*? *Evening News with Katie Couric*? I don't think you actually watch TV. Nice job with the music, though. **BARRY AVERY** { via email }

WE EVEN GOT IT WRONG ON FACIAL HAIR

The Beards of the Year sidebar left me quite disappointed, as did the Best of 2008 feature that surrounds it. Where is William Fitzsimmons?! His beard is nothing short of magnificent, and his latest LP *The Sparrow and the Crow* is undoubtedly one of the best musical offerings of 2008. The small mention in the 2008 Staff Mixtape section isn't nearly enough.
JARED A. MILLER { via email }

DIGITAL VIPS

I love my Paste Digital VIP membership. I enjoy getting the email updates telling me about new features on the site and the digital downloads. As a tree hugger, I feel good knowing that I'm keeping things green by viewing onscreen. I wish more publications would take your lead and stop being so wasteful.
KARRI WELLS { via email }

I'm absolutely loving Paste Digital VIP! Once again, you've done the right thing at the right time with the music I love. I was especially pleased to find one of my favorite bands—Athens, Ga.'s Modern Skirts—featured as this month's download. Keep the great stuff coming! **JOHN MCNICHOLAS** { Atlanta }

ERRATTA: The photo of Sandra McCracken on pg. 55 of Issue #49 was taken by Jordan Brooke Hamlin.

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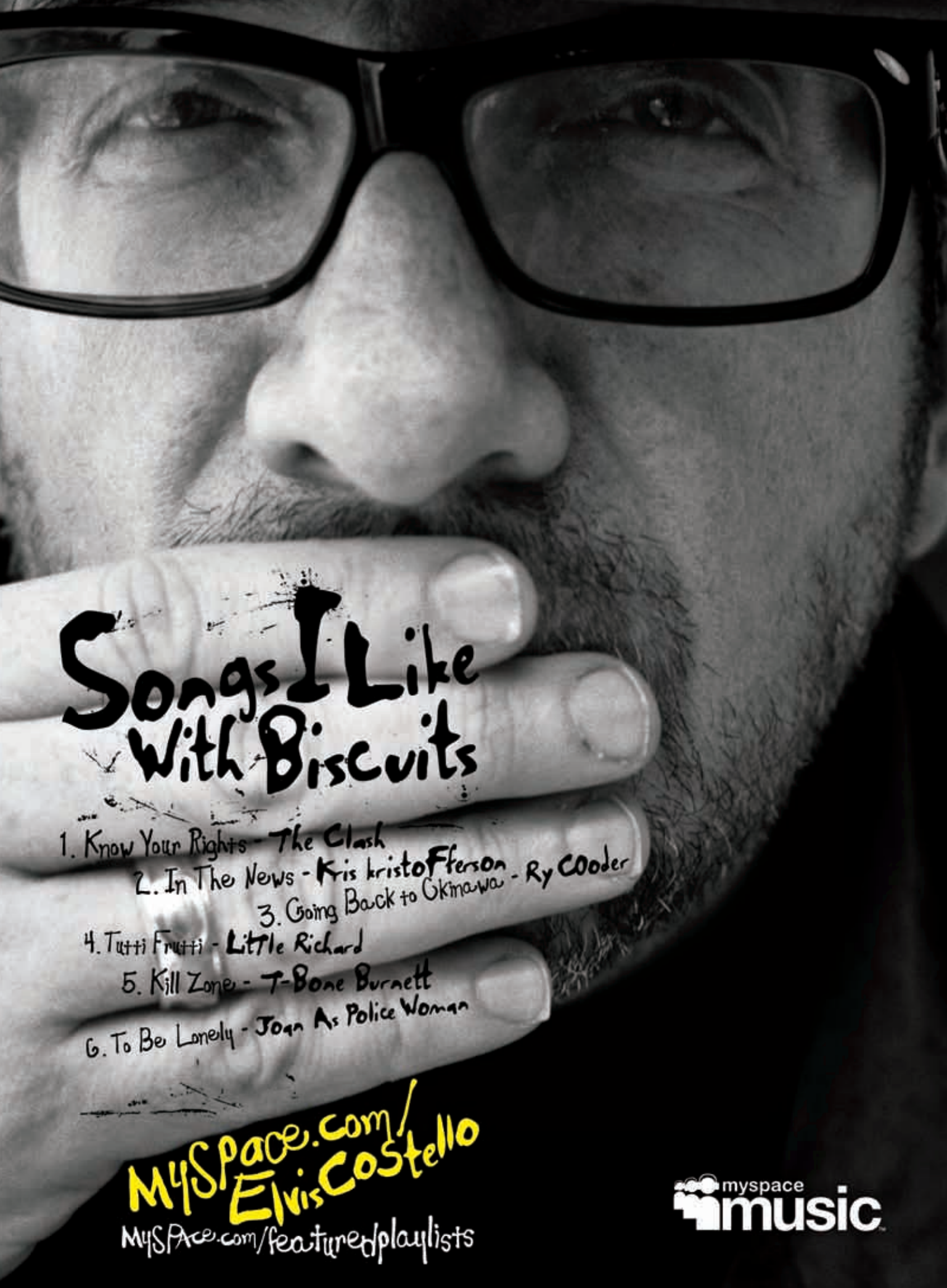
Songs I Like With Biscuits
1. Know Your Rights - The Clash
2. In The News - Kris kristoFferson
3. Going Back to Okinawa - Ry Cooder
4. Tutti Frutti - Little Richard
5. Kill Zone - T-Bone Burnett
6. To Be Lonely - Joan As Police Woman
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ANTONY AND THE JOHNSONS, LILY ALLEN, **DAVID BAZAN,** KEVIN DREW AND FEIST

Jamal Woolard loves "You Can't Stop the Reign" by Shaquille O'Neal featuring Notorious B.I.G.

Photo by Phil Caruso

THE NOTORIOUS M.O.V.I.E.

The black Lincoln Town Car dispatched by the media conglomerate edges into rush-hour traffic with a hired driver, a publicist, a writer and a dude who looks a lot like Biggie Smalls. The temperature drops with the light and, in the dim back seat, Jamal Woolard—with his sleepy eyes, familiar pout and manchild physique—looks pretty damn notorious.

Creeping through Chinatown and over the Manhattan Bridge into Brooklyn, Woolard passes directions up front. He's taking us to Bedford-Stuyvesant, the neighborhood where both he and Biggie grew up. Woolard, 27, is about to make his big-screen debut in Fox Searchlight's *Notorious*, a biopic about the titanic rapper born Christopher Wallace, whose unsolved 1997 drive-by-shooting death still haunts hip-hop.

"Closest I ever got to Big," Woolard says, "was the funeral, sad to say."

Like Wallace, Woolard hustled drugs while putting together a rap career. In 2006, before an appearance on Manhattan's star-making Hot 97, Woolard was shot in his Biggie-sized backside—perhaps, camera footage suggests, by a member of his own entourage. Without telling the DJs, Woolard did his spot sitting on a bullet.

Soon, MTV.com quoted Woolard as being in talks with the Wallace family, calling him "a virtual lock" for the role, though Fox and Woolard insist he was found via Fox's virally marketed biggiecasting.com open call. In any case, give or take fictionalizations like *8 Mile*, the film is hip-hop's first biopic. And it could blow the hell up.

"If you're a Biggie fan and you from Brooklyn, you supposed to *know* all the words, so I didn't need much help with that," Woolard says. Still, he put himself through Biggie boot camp, gaining 80 pounds, and having extensive conversations with Wallace's mother, Voletta, to whom Woolard refers with maximum respect, always, as "Mrs. Wallace." In the film, she's portrayed with equal gravitas by Angela Bassett.

Stepping onto the corner of Fulton Street and St. James Place, a half-block from Biggie's crib, Woolard seems to relax and start being himself. "It's just a regular day in the 'hood," he says. "It doesn't feel weird. I never left." Woolard still lives in Brooklyn, though he's no longer in Bed-Stuy.

It's getting cold. Woolard turns to a man standing on a stoop. "Who block is this, big homey?" he asks.

"Biggie's block," the man says quietly.

"It's a little mind-boggling," I say, "the idea of this huge corporation representing this street, putting it in movie theaters."

"It's an amazing thing," replies Woolard, a post-bling entrepreneur who refers to his debut album, *God Willing*, as "dropping in the second quarter." For him, it's all just a different hustle.

"There goes Nino, from Junior M.A.F.I.A.," Woolard says, pointing back at the corner. "One of Big's right hand mans."

More than a decade after his death, Biggie's presence still looms large. "He the Shakespeare of the ghetto," Woolard says. "Ask anybody. That's how we feel."

JESSE JARNOW

EARS WE TRUST

Kid Sister

Mark Almaria
Feel This Groove

He's this old house DJ. I just bought a car with a cassette player in it, so I've been listening to this cassette on repeat for the last two weeks.

Dru Hill **"Beauty"**

I just like to sing to it because it practices my voice.

Paper Boy **"Ditty"**

My friend sent me that YouTube video the other day. I was like, "I love it!"

Selena

I've been listening to a lot of embarrassing music lately. Selena. I'm not kidding, I love her. She has such a good voice. And really, so tragic, what happened to her.

Ray Charles

I downloaded a bunch of Ray Charles the other day. I saw *Ray* the movie—not for the first time, but I saw it. I was like "Oooh, I want some Ray Charles." So I downloaded the whole box set thing on iTunes. [Kid Sister tells story about playing some Brother Ray during a dinner party for which she cooked a superlative gumbo.] I was like, "Sing it, Ray, sing it. 'Cause this shit is great. 'Cause this gumbo is *tasty*." I'm just saying my gumbo was the shit. It was good.

Kid Sister's debut album *Dream Date* is forthcoming. She conducted a portion of this interview while getting her nails done.

David Bazan loves Fugazi, The Beatles and Bedhead.

IN THE STUDIO WITH... David Bazan

David Bazan is listening. He has his eyes closed, his scruffy head down, and his right foot tapping on the floor of his basement studio. He lifts his hand a little as the pedal-steel guitar emerges on "Hard to Be," one of the many intimate songs from his upcoming album *Curse Your Branches*. The sound is vintage Bazan—flat-four strumming, aching voice, grim lyrics—but there's a new urgency here that makes the former Pedro the Lion frontman a little nervous.

"All those tunes in the past are basically fiction," Bazan says, "but these are the first tunes I've ever done that are almost straight nonfiction. They're really all about my life. Which is a little weird."

It's fitting then that *Curse Your Branches* was recorded here, in a cluttered corner below Bazan's suburban house, way north of the Seattle scene, past a giant eagle carved out of wood in someone's yard, and next door to an ardent McCain/Palin supporter. It's Raymond Carver territory here in Edmonds, Wash., and Bazan is right at home.

Upstairs is Bazan's wife, Ann, and his four-year-old daughter, who's wearing a paper crown when I arrive. Seeming more skeptical of the press than even her father, the little girl adjusts her crown and looks me over before pointing down the stairs. "He's down there."

Downstairs, guitars hang from the walls and a rough-looking upright piano is pushed to one side. There's a Roland synth, a Mac, a baby monitor, fingernail clippers, an electric drill, and Bazan himself in a black T-shirt and jeans. He offers me a chair and some tea, and then cues up a few rough mixes on iTunes. We get into "Please, Baby, Please," a rollicking number about Bazan getting so drunk one night last year that his wife had to carry him up the stairs and nurse him back to life. "That was bad news," he says, looking at the floor and shaking his head.

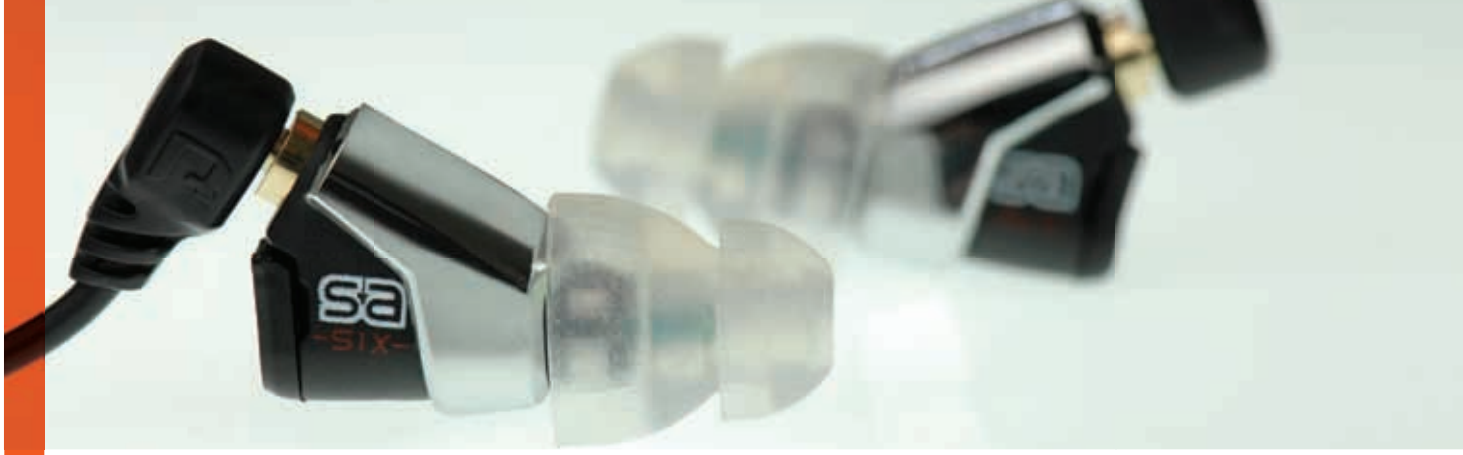
Bazan is no stranger to bad news (nearly a decade of Pedro the Lion songs full of doubt, heartache and loneliness attest to that), but the songs on the new record are different, mainly because, as Bazan says, "they're just what's happened in my life, straight on." That's meant more long talks with his wife, his friends and his parents about the lines between life and art, upstairs and downstairs. "I don't ask permission or anything," he says, "but I'm trying to be a good guy, and if they ever felt really hurt by something I was singing about, I really would have to reconsider. But so far they've been nothing but positive."

Bazan has spent hours in the basement trying to balance lo-fi genius and hi-fi polish. He's listened to the White Album a lot, and Fugazi's *Red Medicine*. When things get hairy, he can always call his friend and former bandmate T.W. Walsh, who's set to mix and master Bazan's new album from his studio in Boston.

"It can be kind of lonely," Bazan admits, "but I can always just, you know, turn it all off down here and head upstairs." He rubs a hand over his beard, and with a little chuckle he turns back to the computer. "Sometimes it can be hard to separate the upstairs dude from the downstairs dude," he says in his phlegmy baritone, "but it's not a terrible problem to have."

He clicks "play" and closes his eyes for another listen. **TRAVIS NICHOLS**

Bazan photo by Lyle Owerko. Kid Sister photo by Andreas Larsson.



GADGET GODSEND: Sleek Audio's SA6 Earphones

Earphones. You wedge them in your ears and music comes out. How much room could there possibly be to innovate on such a straightforward device? Well, apparently enough for *Popular Science* to include Sleek Audio's new SA6 earphones ($249.99)—the first tunable pair in existence—on its list of the Top 100 Innovations of 2008, which also features a particle accelerator and a Japanese broadband satellite. Not bad. *Paste* talked to Jason Krywko, COO of the family-owned company (which originally specialized in designing hearing aids) and he kindly gave us an earful. **JASON KILLINGSWORTH**

ON THE REASON SLEEK INVENTED TUNABLE EARPHONES:

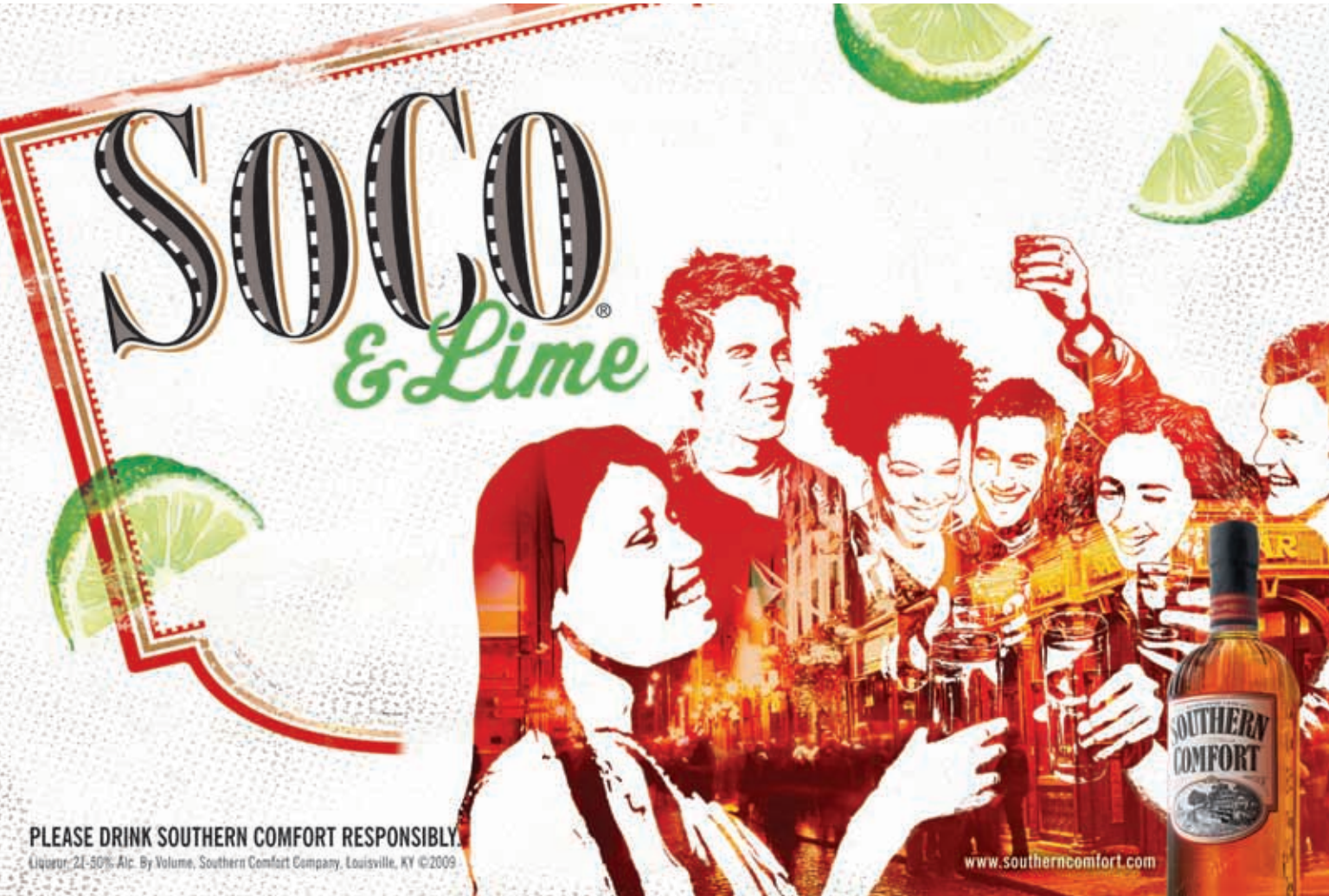
"Everyone's ears have different natural acoustics. If I were to fit 10 people for hearing aids who all have the exact same hearing loss, every single one of them would want a completely different hearing aid when it's all said and done. Not to mention a different frequency response. And that's what people need to understand: The same is true with headphones."

ON THAT DAMN RINGING:

"When everything's quiet after blasting music and you hear a ringing in your ear, you are actually hearing the nerve dying. But if you put noise-isolating earphones like ours in your ear, you don't have to crank it. You can listen to your iPod during a plane flight at a quarter of the volume and fall asleep if you want to."

ON THE INDUSTRY'S DIRTY LITTLE SECRET:

"Most earphone companies—even reputable ones—spike the mid-high frequencies. And that creates a wow-factor. You put them in your ears, turn on AC/DC, and you're like, 'Oh my gosh, listen to how amazing this guitar sounds.' But then after about 10 minutes, you can't wait to rip them out of your ears. Over time, those frequencies aren't natural." **[SLEEKAUDIO.COM]**



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Antony loves the air, because it cradles him on every side.

SING SING: ANTONY HEGARTY'S VOCAL TIPS

Sometimes, when his performances are really on, Antony Hegarty enters a transcendent state "where you just feel like you're aligned with all the stars and the heavens, and everything is exactly as it should be." But those moments haven't come easily. Hegarty—whose tremulous voice has become one of indie music's most instantly recognizable sounds—says he learned to sing by emulating his favorite vocalists, and by continuing to sing even when it seemed he did not have the gift. On the verge of releasing Antony and the Johnsons' startling new album, *The Crying Light* (review pg 56), Hegarty shared with *Paste* some soft-spoken, faintly British-accented singing lessons. **NICK MARINO**

SING NOW, WORRY LATER "A lot of artists that I know get really paralyzed in weird self-negation and self-criticism too early in the creative process. And it's a battle for me—it's a battle for everyone—to not censor oneself while one is still in the process of emerging. You just have to take the risk and emerge, and then later on—much later—you can decide whether it's valuable, in your opinion."

GET SOME NERVE "If you create something and you're really ashamed and embarrassed by it, oftentimes that's a good sign. You're taking a risk, but you're challenging yourself to be more vulnerable or to put yourself out there. In that vulnerability is great strength."

STICK IT TO 'EM "If you just imagine your criticism, and you put it into a little bundle of sticks and you place that bundle of sticks a foot away from yourself, that space between you and that bundle of sticks is your creative space. How far are you gonna put it from you? You could set it a mile from you, and you could dance all around the countryside. Or you could glue it to your forehead and never be allowed to take a breath."

BE PERSISTENT "The only reason I'm a good singer is because I kept plowing away. I kept singing. I just kept trying at it. I got a report card in second grade that said, 'If only his prowess matched his enthusiasm,' for music. There's no secret recipe for these things; it's just about giving yourself permission. Creativity, it's the essence of being a human being or being a manifest creature—every step we take, every word we utter is a creative gesture."

↑ Antony photo by Don Felix Cervantes. Bibliochaise photo by Nobody&co.

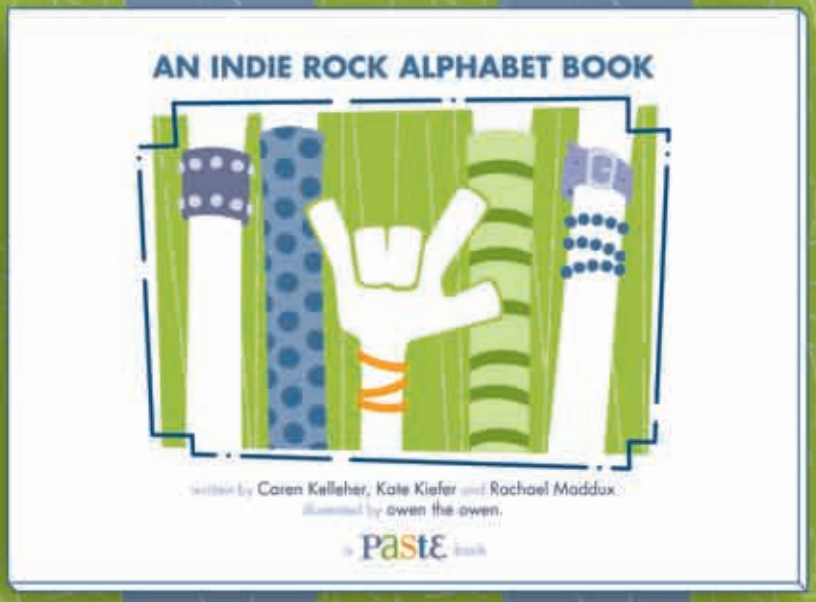
MIXED *media*

CHAIRS FOR **BOOKWORMS**

The Italians apparently take at least one thing more seriously than sitting around sipping espresso—and that's sitting around sipping espresso and reading. Behold the *bibliochaise*, a reading chair from Milan-based Nobody&co. that holds five meters of books in a catacomb of pockets along the arms, back and sides. Buy more than one if you plan to read the collected works of writer Mary Faulkner, who penned 904 books in her lifetime. And note that the cushion covers are removable, in case you spill your espresso.

CHARLES MCNAIR

It's Never Too Early To Rock!


AN INDIE ROCK ALPHABET BOOK
written by Caren Kelleher, Kate Kiefer and Rachael Maddux
illustrated by owen the owen.
Paste book

Paste's first book - *An Indie Rock Alphabet Book* is a unique way for musically inclined kids to learn their ABCs. Kids and parents alike will enjoy a rhyming A-Z guide to hip musical artists, from Animal Collective and Over The Rhine to Tom Waits and the Zombies.

Available for $12.95 at The Paste Store **pastemagazine.com/store** and Amazon.com.

Want to sneak a peek? Flip through the digital version at pastemagazine.com/alphabet.

Story Time Is Cool Again!

ON THE WATERFRONT

KEVIN DREW DIRECTS FEIST IN SHORT FILM

Midway into Feist's 2007 breakthrough album *The Reminder* is a bewitching ballad called "The Water." The track moves slowly, as if water itself, and its emotional resonance inspired Broken Social Scene co-founder Kevin Drew to adapt the tune into a short film—or visual poem, as he likes to think of it. "The song has so much real, honest and raw age to it," Drew says. "It sounds like an old classic song."

Wanting the film to relate the song's essence and not its actual lyrics, Drew took the idea of a loved one coming back to life and tied it to sparse dialogue and shots of concentrated facial expressions. The film's pace is excruciatingly slow, and intentionally so. "I wanted the film to match the patience within the recording," he says. "If you listen carefully you can hear all the details of chairs and pianos clicking around and the musicians breathing ... it has such a strong emotion to it."

After recruiting actors David Fox and Cillian Murphy, Drew rounded out the cast with the songbird herself. Feist plays a sort of love interest—the sort that gets dragged through the snowy forest in a mummy wrap, then thawed out by a fire. "Kevi," as Feist calls Drew, "told me one day that he wanted to make a film for 'The Water,' and he knew he needed Cillian's blue eyes and David's brown ones and that it was going to be a fairytale," Feist says. "It felt like a cross between a book I read as a kid called *The Snow Queen*, a silent film and a long walk in the woods with snow crunching under your feet."

The short, which was shot in two days in Toronto last January, is awaiting submission into festivals. Perhaps cinephiles on the festival circuit will be able to decipher the enigmatic plot. "There was nothing shocking or any original twist within it," Drew says. "It was following the core but I really love how it's up for interpretation for the viewer. I'm one of those people who makes things and figures it out afterwards." **LOREN LANKFORD**

Photo of Kevin Drew by Norman Wong. Feist photo courtesy of Revolver Film Company

MIXED media WHOSE ROBE IS HEADED FOR THE SMITHSONIAN?

the PASTE 7

OUR FAVORITE ENTERTAINING BITS OF WHATEVER

1. **Nick Marino, Managing Editor ❤s World's Smallest Postal Service** Type your message online, and the WSPS transcribes it in miniscule handwriting on 1 x 1.5-inch stationary, shipping the note in a wax-sealed envelope. Letters come with a magnifying glass! **LeafCutterDesigns.com**

2. **Jason Killingsworth, Deputy Editor & Games Editor ❤s CrispyGamer.com** Instead of weighing the medium's cultural import for a broad audience, most gaming critics dish out insider fanboy tech-speak about gameplay mechanics and dialogue trees. Thank God for Crispy Gamer's writing stable. A cool swallow of purified water in the irradiated wasteland of the gaming press.

3. **Austin L. Ray, Web Editor ❤s The Nerves' *One Way Ticket*** This L.A. band self-released just one four-song EP during its lifespan, despite its prolific songwriting. Kudos to Alive Records for issuing this completist's wet dream, worth buying for the first seven tracks alone. With 13 more, it's a trove of power-pop riches.

4. **Steve Thorson, Web Designer ❤s Alhambra** Think board games are for kids and/or nerds? Give Alhambra a try and you'll be forced to either change your opinion or start attending DragonCon.

5. **Palmer Houchins, Marketing Manager ❤s Ric Flair** The unrivaled pomp and timeless swagger of the pro-wrestler also known as the "Nature Boy" harkens back to the classic sportsmen of yesteryear. His trademarked sequined robe will soon be donated to the Smithsonian. Woo! **tinyurl.com/5kn98s**

6. **Rachael Maddux, Assistant Editor ❤s Simply Orange Juice** The pulp-free Original variety never lets me down, and Simply Apple and Simply Limeade are equally delicious. If they made Simply Nuclear Waste, I'd probably chug it by the gallon.

7. **Tim Regan-Porter, President ❤s Sonos Multi-Room Music System** Play music in any room, send the same music to multiple rooms, stream Internet radio and control it all wirelessly. As an early AirTunes adopter, I thought this was technology in search of a problem. Today, it's as indispensable as my iPod.

PROMOTIONAL PROMOTIONAL PROMOTIONAL PROMOTIONAL PROMOTIONAL

CMJ MUSIC MARATHON

PASTE TEAMED UP WITH **OURSTAGE.COM** AND **INDIE OUTLAW** TO PRESENT THE FIRST EVER **CMJ** ARTIST LOUNGE AT THE **RED BULL** SPACE DURING THE CMJ MUSIC CONFERENCE IN NEW YORK. FOR THE ENTIRETY OF THE CMJ MUSIC MARATHON, **ONITSUKA TIGER** OUTFITTED SHOWCASING BANDS WITH FREE SHOES, WHILE **GARNIER** PROVIDED COMPLIMENTARY HAIR-CARE PRODUCTS. IN THE EVENINGS, SPONSORS **BMI** AND **OURSTAGE.COM** HOSTED SHOWCASES FOR EMERGING BANDS LIKE SOUTHERN-FRIED ATLANTA ROCKERS **PONDEROSA** AND BROOKLYN POWER-POP-STERS **THE SUBJECTS**, ALONGSIDE OTHER ACTS LIKE **GRINGO STAR**, **PORSTASTATIC**, **DELTA SPIRIT** AND **JUSTIN TOWNES EARLE**.

Ponderosa

Cheeseburger

Vivian Girls

Takka Takka

Gringo Star

Photos by Jessica Worwetz and Kashish Das Shreshta/Red Bull Space

PROMOTIONAL PROMOTIONAL PROMOTIONAL PROMOTIONAL PROMOTIONAL

THE DEEP VIBRATION

"Front man Matt Campbell mixes the high-pitched cry of Neil Young...the sweet lyric-ism of Gram Parsons and the chugging, intertwined guitars give the music an appealing post-Stones strut."
-Chicago Reader

"A rock and roll legend in the making."
-American Songwriter Magazine

"The band is absolutely compelling live."
-Paste

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MUSICIAN

FIVE NIGHTS WITH SHUGO TOKUMARU

Tokyo singer/songwriter Shugo Tokumaru's dazzling third album, *Exit*, features lyrics based on dreams he's had, somnambulant wanderings brought to life by his whimsical musicality. (More than 50 instruments appear on the record, and he played almost all of them.) Though we're fuzzy on the details—Tokumaru sings mostly in Japanese, with flourishes of endearingly wobbly English sprinkled throughout—we wondered what the fruits of his freewheeling subconscious would spark in our own dreams. So we asked *Paste* assistant editor **Rachael Maddux** to play the record at night and keep a dream journal of her sleepy-time musings. We thought it would be fun. We weren't counting on the rat.

NIGHT 1: Played CD on repeat as I was falling asleep. At first, imagined cartoon children flying kites. Around the third song, drifted off thinking of baked beans. Came to when CD player skittered back to the first track, after the last song. Shut off music, fell asleep. Had long dream involving someone siphoning gas out of my grandmother's car.

NIGHT 2: Again played CD as I was falling asleep, but turned it off before I zonked out. Again had visions of children and kites, but this time was interrupted by the scritch-scratching of a rat behind my oven. Vowed to call landlord in the morning.

NIGHT 3: Gave up and went to sleep after CD player spazzed out halfway through the first song, making weird fluttery noises.

NIGHT 4: Forgot about CD player malfunction until I tried to play CD again. Gave up after one song, again. Dreamt about hanging out with Bradford Cox of Deerhunter. He was really nice!

NIGHT 5: Attempted to listen to album throughout the night. Ripped to iPod to avoid crappy CD malfunctioning. Drifted off, envisioned children with kites. Half-dreamed of some confusing drama transpiring in my apartment, with me dressed like Angelina Jolie in *Changeling* and standing in my closet, screaming. Woke up with my neck twisted, face smushed into a pillow, mouth agog and the back of my throat dry and prickly. Around the same time, realized the rat was back. Flung off covers, paused Shugo, stomped to kitchen, thwacked oven with Swiffer sweeper, unpaused Shugo, threw self back into bed. Found music difficult to enjoy in competition with rat scratching. Eventually discovered many songs I hadn't previously heard while conscious. Passed out and had intermittent dreams—one about *Mad Men*, which I've never seen, and another involving a fight with my mom and my sister on a wooded hillside, something about my mom having "knee cancer." Woke up to rat sounds. Heard frenetic toy piano of "Parachute" bursting through the speakers. Turned off music and passed out for four blissfully silent hours.

SHUGO TOKUMARU
HOMETOWN: Tokyo **ALBUM:** *Exit* **FOR FANS OF:** Sigur Rós, Andrew Bird, The Beatles

MUSICIANS

Beatbeat Whisper loves brilliant animated film The Point.

BEATBEAT WHISPER GROWS UP AND PLAYS ON

Siblings Ayla and Davyd Nereo keep few boundaries between them. As they answer questions in chorus, it's easy to imagine their childhood in California's sylvan Sonoma County, sharing the family piano and the "y" in their names. Both have other projects, but commenced their "co-creative process" one rainy evening to begin bearing tender fruits of free-folk on their family tree. They became Beatbeat Whisper soon after, when the name popped into Ayla's head. "Serene! Boss!" Davyd said. Band consensus, just like that.

Ayla grew up worried she was tone deaf, so she rarely sang in front of anyone—even her brother. But her concerns couldn't have been less founded. These days, one sibling's voice never leaves the other without harmony for long, and their blend sounds natural enough to be a joint birthright. The aptly titled "And Suddenly Apart Was Shared," from sophomore album *Wonder Continental*, begins with a thanksgiving round the Nereos sang as kids, then tumbles into Beatbeat's brand of winding folk and prosodic storytelling. "If one progression becomes another, becomes another," goes their songwriting logic, "and suddenly the song is finished and we never went back to a 'chorus'... well, guess that's how it has to be!"

HENRY FREEDLAND

BEATBEAT WHISPER
HOMETOWN: Oakland, Calif. **ALBUM:** *Wonder Continental* **BAND MEMBERS:** Ayla Nereo (vocals, guitar, piano, lap harp, kalimba, shakers, drum) and Davyd Nereo (vocals, guitar, mandolin, strumstick, harmonica, drum, chord organ) **FOR FANS OF:** Joanna Newsom, Mount Eerie/The Microphones, Mirah

Tokumaru photo by Hideki Otsuka. Beatbeat photo by Adrian Bischoff

MUSICIANS

THE TOUGH ALLIANCE
SPRING HAS SPRUNG

According to the official website for Brussels Airlines, spring is the best time to visit Gothenburg, Sweden. Spring may also the best time to listen to Gothenburg native sons The Tough Alliance—as winter gives way to refreshing sunshine, Tough Alliance's third proper full-length, *A New Chance*, practically begs for heavy rotation. Its songs are the soundtrack for the promise of tomorrow, teeming with piano stabs, hyperactive basslines, disembodied vocal shouts and lush, heaving arrangements. "Any day is a new chance," the title track's chorus proclaims, and it's as much a self-help motivator as it is the record's thesis.

Paste asked half of the dance duo, Eric Berglund, to give us a peek into his plans for 2009. Think of these as New Spring Resolutions. **AUSTIN L. RAY**

❶ **WATCH WIMBLEDON** "I can't wait to witness Federer make it all right again."

❷ **MASTER THE ITALIAN LANGUAGE** "I'll try my hardest to get there in time for the next trip."

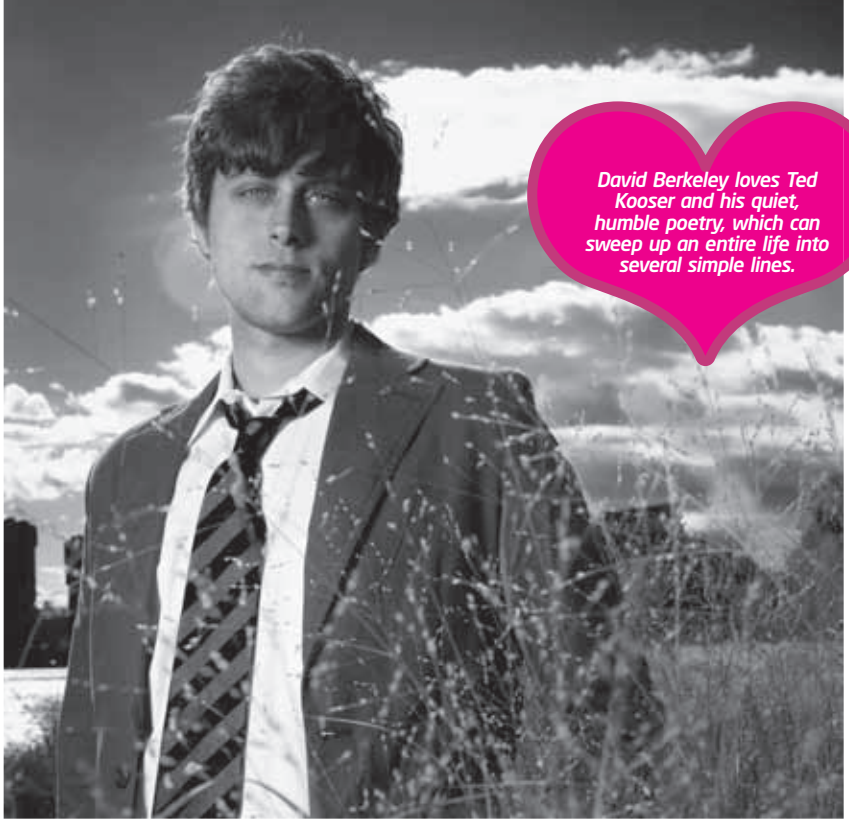
❸ **HANG WITH MY DOG** "I can't think of anything more sane to do with my life."

❹ **RELEASE BENNY BENASSI REMIX OF TOUGH ALLIANCE** "I know 2009 will be a year of miracles."

❺ **DON'T DWELL ON 2010** "I'm sick and tired of living in the future. I just want some now."

THE TOUGH ALLIANCE
HOMETOWN: Gothenburg, Sweden
MEMBERS: Eric Berglund and Henning Fürst
ALBUM: *A New Chance* **FOR FANS OF:** Junior Boys, Muscles, El Guincho

Tough Alliance photo by Marcus Palmqvist; Berkeley photo by Tobias Prasse



David Berkeley loves Ted Kooser and his quiet, humble poetry, which can sweep up an entire life into several simple lines.

MUSICIAN

DAVID BERKELEY KEEPS MOVING

Tucked between a cellist and a trumpeter on stage at Decatur, Ga., acoustic hotspot Eddie's Attic, singer/songwriter David Berkeley is singing like he means it. "Homesick is hard when you don't know just where it is where you call home." It's an appropriate sentiment for a guy who's lived in every corner of the country; who's spent the last 15 months in Tralonca, a tiny village just outside of Corsica, France; and who's back in the States playing 22 shows in 20 days.

"There are 35 people who live there and basically nothing else," he says of his adopted village, sitting in a coffee shop down the street from Eddie's. "There's a bread truck that comes every morning and a meat truck that comes once a week and a fish truck that comes once a week. We can go into the city, but it's like living in a different era—goats and sheep all around."

His sojourn was oddly timed, as his career was just beginning to pick up steam. He'd appeared on radio programs like *World Cafe* and *Mountain Stage*, and songs from his 2004 album *After the Wrecking Ships* were getting played on radio and TV shows. His follow-up, *Strange Light*, was already recorded with Brian Deck (Modest Mouse, Iron & Wine, Josh Ritter) in Chicago and ready for release.

But in some ways, it made perfect sense. Berkeley's wife was studying village traditions for her PhD in anthropology, and he was able to spend his time off the road with his son, who'd just turned one. It also suited the same wanderlust that made him think he'd be a travel writer before he ever started writing songs. After a stint as a river-rafting guide in Idaho, he moved to New Mexico to work for *Outside* magazine, hiking in various locales and writing about his adventures. He then moved to Brooklyn and started teaching creative writing at an impoverished public school, while writing travel pieces on the side and playing his songs in local clubs.

"As music started to pick up, I had less and less time to pitch stories," he says. "I was doing three things and ended up having to make a choice. Ultimately, it became a choice between music and teaching. I chose music, but maybe I'll return to teach at some point in my life. I hope I will. Sometimes I feel selfish about being a musician, and other times I feel like music is the highest calling."

After finally releasing *Strange Light*, Berkeley will move back to Atlanta in early 2009 for his wife to finish school. After that, he says, who knows where he'll go? **JOSH JACKSON**

DAVID BERKELEY HOMETOWN: Atlanta **ALBUM:** *Strange Light* **FOR FANS OF:** David Gray, Damien Rice, Josh Ritter

PAPER NOR PLASTIC

Our Favorite Sacks & Bags

1. **Elaspel Roll Bag** $200, Elsapel.com
2. **Diaper Tote in Transportation Multi** $184, dwellstudio.com
3. **Essential Lapsac women's laptop case, Ultimate Edition** $68.50, delight.com
4. **Bob in Davidson Walnut** $90, trkfld.com
5. **The Leaf Clutch in deep wine** $49, TTPeasandCarrots.etsy.com
6. **Bamboo Bag 1 reusable grocery sack** $24.95, envirosax.com
7. **Medium Custom Laptop Messenger Bag in plum, dark brown and slate blue** $140, timbuk2.com

PHOTOGRAPHY BY JOHN ELLIS

JOLIE HOLLAND

the living and the dead

"Holland's fourth album - far and away her strongest - is flawlessly executed and fearlessly told."
– Blender Magazine

"here the lady troubadour continues with a writer's knack for making every next page better than the last." - Filter Magazine

"POSITIVELY ENCHANTING." - *LA Weekly*

"she sounds more commanding and confident than ever"
- Paste Magazine

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LILY ALLEN
Gets All Dolled Up

Since the release of her 2007 debut, *Alright, Still*, 23-year-old British starlet Lily Allen has established herself as a chameleonic pop darling—by turns a teary blogger, frothy tabloid target and mercurial style icon. With her buoyant sophomore album *It's Not Me, It's You* out this month, we were inspired to turn her various personas into paper-dolls for some old-school play-time fun.

RACHAEL MADDUX

1. BROODING MYSPACE BLOGGER: From her declaration that she's "fat, ugly and shittier than Winehouse" to the kidnapping of her beloved pooch Maggie May, Allen has chronicled many a melodrama on her public weblog.

2. TIPSY AWARDS SHOW GUEST: On more than one occasion, Allen has found herself plastered across newsstands for getting, well, plastered.

3. SVELTE FASHION PLATE: After being roundly criticized about her unkempt appearance, Allen began popping up on red carpets and in women's magazines looking trim and chic.

4. SASSY POP STAR: On stage and in the studio with producers like Mark Ronson and Greg Kurstin, Allen fuses her brash wit with girlish vulnerability.

ILLUSTRATION BY EDWINA WHITE

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Hair by Val Hamilton. Styling by Jessika Donahue. Makeup by Susan Muszari

JOLTIN' JOE AND THE HOSPICE BED

BY ANDY WHITMAN ILLUSTRATION BY MONTSE BERNAL

My dad, who died a couple months ago, was not much of a music fan. He had the same small stack of vinyl LPs that could be found in millions of suburban American households in the 1960s: Frank Sinatra, Barbra Streisand, Herb Alpert, Ferrante & Teicher and, thanks to me, Simon & Garfunkel.

Like most sons, I had an ambivalent relationship with my father. I loved him. He drove me crazy. Sometimes I admired him. Sometimes I wanted to be nothing like him. But he instilled in me a love of baseball, and some of my fondest childhood memories involve sitting with my old man in rust-corroded Cleveland Stadium, watching the Indians battle the New York Yankees. My dad was a Yankees fan, and extolled the wonders of the Great Yankees Teams of Yore: Ruth and Gehrig, DiMaggio and Berra. And with the contemptuous dismissal of impatient youth, I didn't give a rip about old ballplayers, viewed the Yankees as the Evil Empire, and cheered vigorously for the local Indians.

Through the decades, baseball remained the glue that united us, the common obsession that provided a shared space in our lives when other issues divided us. He hated the designated-hitter rule, bemoaned the disappearance of the doubleheader, and believed expansion had watered down the talent in the major leagues. He remained a staunch Yankees fan until the end. And the Yanks provided a musical meeting point when, like his hero Sinatra, my dad decried the evils of my cherished rock 'n' roll, and pontificated that only the beloved standards of Cole Porter and George Gershwin could measure up to true greatness.

"Yeah?" I said. "Listen to this."

I played him Simon and Garfunkel's "Mrs. Robinson." I snuck one in on him, like a Whitey Ford fastball, high and hard, and it hit him right where he lived:

Where have you gone, Joe DiMaggio?
A nation turns its lonely eyes to you
(Ooo ooo ooo).
What's that you say, Mrs. Robinson?
"Joltin' Joe" has left and gone away
(Hey, hey, hey, hey, hey, hey).

"That's pretty good," he admitted. "It's catchy. And I miss DiMaggio, too."

"I knew you did," I told him.

My dad never really warmed up to rock 'n' roll. But Simon & Garfunkel weren't rock 'n' roll, and occasionally I'd catch him at the old console stereo, my copy of *Bookends* in hand, ready to cue up "Mrs. Robinson." He always had a weakness for DiMaggio.

Like most sons, I had an ambivalent relationship with my father. I loved him. He drove me crazy. Sometimes I admired him. Sometimes I wanted to be nothing like him.

Dad spent the last week of his life in a hospice room, surrounded by heart monitors and morphine drips and the smell of disinfectant. He drifted in and out of consciousness. He couldn't speak, and it was hard to determine what he understood. My father, who had spent countless summer evenings with me tossing a baseball back and forth, the picture of middle-aged health and vitality, was now a helpless, shriveled old man. I sat by his bedside and flipped through TV channels. It was October, an upstart expansion team called the Tampa Bay Rays had made the playoffs, and the perennially great Yankees were nowhere to be found. The whole world had turned upside down.

A couple days before Dad died, I brought in a boombox, set it on his bedside stand, and pointed it at his unresponsive head. "Listen to this," I said. I played "Mrs. Robinson," of course. I kept the volume down low so I wouldn't disturb anyone, but I cranked it up, just a little, before the verse about Joe DiMaggio. He didn't move.

I don't know what I was expecting. A miracle, I suppose, some signal that the song that had once united us could unite us again, across too many years and too many disagreements and two lives of mutual incomprehension. But he didn't respond. I wanted to ask a million questions: Can you even hear this song? Why were you such a jerk? Why did it always have to be a zero-sum game? Why couldn't you ever admit that George Gershwin and Paul Simon could both be great? Why couldn't I let any of it go and just love you in your cussed obstinacy? I laid them all out in my head, all the old, unanswerable, life-haunting questions. He never spoke another word. I packed up the boombox and drove back home.

➥ ANDY WHITMAN IS A PASTE SENIOR CONTRIBUTING EDITOR.

THE INFORMER

PASTE'S GUIDE TO THE MONTH IN CULTURE

FEBRUARY

3

2/3 Celebrated Japanese author Yoko Ogawa's latest novel *The Housekeeper and the Professor* **Also:** The special 30th anniversary edition of director Hal Ashby's *Being There* (starring Peter Sellers and Shirley MacLaine), and documentary *The Night James Brown Saved Boston* on DVD

5

2/5 John Legend's *Evolver* tour comes to New York's Radio City Music Hall

6

2/6 The first annual Big Ears Festival kicks off in Knoxville, Tenn., featuring musical experimenters like Philip Glass, Negativland and Michael Gira.

8

2/8 The 51st annual Grammy Awards air on CBS.

10

11

13

2/11 Santogold—who released not one, but two albums that made *Paste*'s Best of 2008 list—begins a four-date stint opening for Coldplay in Japan.

15

2/10 New albums from Lily Allen, India.Arie and Ben Lee (featuring Cary Brothers and Missy Higgins). And, finally, Missy Elliott releases the long-delayed *Block Party.*

2/15 Backbeat Books' *Ultimate Hendrix: An Illustrated Encyclopedia of Live Concerts and Sessions.*

2/13 Las Vegas' intimate Pearl theater hosts the live debut of new Maynard James Keenan (Tool, A Perfect Circle) project Puscifer, a multimedia onslaught featuring collaborators such as Jonny Polonsky, Lisa Germano and Milla Jovovich.

17

2/17 New albums from Erykah Badu, Robyn Hitchcock & the Venus 3, Sam Roberts, Eleni Mandell, and Gurf Morlix (with guests Ruthie Foster & Patty Griffin).

24

2/24 The weeklong, independent Noise Pop 2009 Festival kicks off at venues throughout San Francisco. Artists include Antony and the Johnsons, No Age and A.C. Newman.

NOISE POP '09

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50 GREAT MOMENTS IN OUR MAGAZINE'S LIFETIME

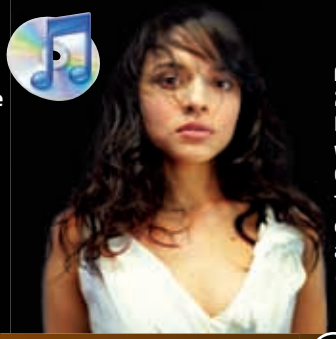
1 JULY 2, 2002 The first issue of *Paste* rolls off the printing press! Victoria Williams fans overjoyed.

2003

2 OCT. 14, 2002 Ryan Adams storms into a Nashville crowd and gives a $30 refund to a fan who requested Bryan Adams' "Summer of '69." Americana wiseass Robbie Fulks responds by offering future hecklers free merchandise for requesting Bryan Adams songs at Ryan Adams shows.

3 FEB. 19, 2003 The Postal Service releases *Give Up*, which becomes Sub Pop's second-best-selling album (right behind Nirvana's *Bleach*). Indie kids wonder whether it's really OK to dance.

4 FEB. 23, 2003 Norah Jones wins five Grammys for her debut album *Come Away With Me*.



5 APR. 28, 2003 Apple opens the iTunes Music Store in the United States, soon becoming the world's #1 music retailer by making it easier to buy digital songs than steal them.

6 JUNE 5, 2003 Beloved actress Natalie Portman finishes her fancy book-learnin' and graduates from Harvard.

7 JULY 5, 2003 Johnny Cash gives his final performance, appropriately enough, at the Carter Family Fold—a rustic 1,000-seat venue in Hiltons, Va., less than two months after the death of his wife June Carter Cash.

8 AUG. 5, 2003 *The OC* premieres on FOX. Its soudtrack, under Alexandra Patsavas' supervision, triggers a new era in music/TV convergence. As a result, indie rock tiptoes ever closer to the mainstream.

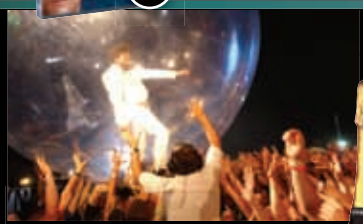
9 AUG. 15, 2003 MySpace launches, transforming the way bands promote themselves.

10 DEC. 17, 2003 New Line Cinema releases the final installment of Peter Jackson's brilliant adaptation of J.R.R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy. *The Return of the King* becomes the first fantasy film to win a Best Picture Oscar.

11 MARCH 19, 2004 Charlie Kaufman and Michel Gondry scramble brains with their instant cinematic classic, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.

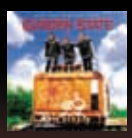
2004

12 APRIL 13, 2004 Eleven years after the band's bitter breakup, the original lineup of the Pixies reunites to play a gig at the Fine Line Music Cafe in Minneapolis. The show leads to a full-blown reunion tour.



13 MAY 2, 2004 Dressed in his customary white suit, Flaming Lips frontman Wayne Coyne steps into a giant plastic bubble and walks atop the crowd at Coachella.

14 JULY 1, 2004 Georgia law allows "high gravity" beers (those with up to 14 percent ABV) to be sold in the state for the first time. *Paste* staff lunches at local watering hole The Brick Store Pub get a little longer, a little louder.



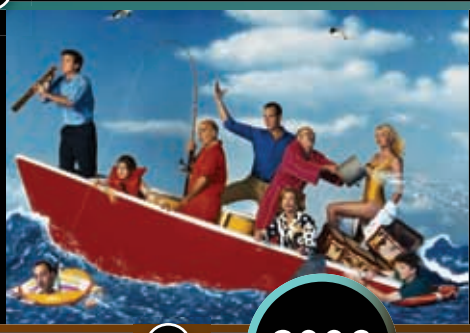
15 AUG. 10, 2004 The Shins change your life as the *Garden State* soundtrack hits shelves.

CONTINUED

16 SEPT. 22, 2004 The series premiere of *LOST* takes episodic television to new heights.

17 SEPT. 28, 2004 After 37 years of circulating bootlegs and half-finished suites, Brian Wilson finally releases a studio recording of *SMiLE*, his "teenage symphony to God." Somehow, it lives up to expectations.

18 OCT. 19, 2004 Nearly a year after his apparent suicide in Los Angeles, Elliott Smith's final album, *From a Basement on The Hill*, is released by his family. Fans are devastated all over again by "A Fond Farewell."

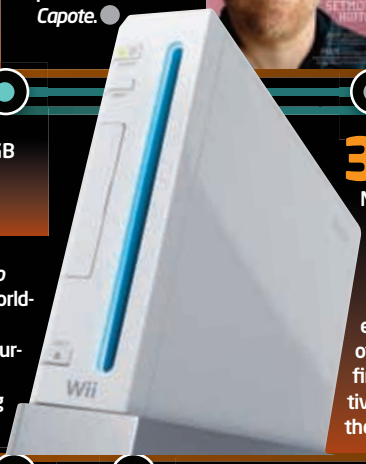


25 MARCH 5, 2006 Thanks largely to his appearance on the cover of *Paste* #20, Philip Seymour Hoffman wins the Best Actor Academy Award for his performance in *Capote*.

26 JUNE 9, 2006 Robert Altman directs his final film, a sweet, fictional take on Garrison Keillor's beloved radio program, *A Prarie Home Companion*.

27 SEPT. 26, 2006 Previously available only to students and "selected work networks," Facebook opens up to anyone with a valid e-mail address. Workplace productivity across America hits an all-time low.

2006



28 OCT. 15, 2006 Legendary rock club CBGB hosts its final performance, a show by punk icon and poet Patti Smith.

29 NOV. 17, 2006 *Casino Royale* hits theaters worldwide, showcasing Daniel Craig's reinvented James Bond and ensuring another generation of films from one of the longest-running series in cinema history.

30 NOV. 19, 2006 Nintendo revolutionizes console gaming (again) with the U.S. launch of the Wii, enabling millions of non-gamers to finally have interactive fun in front of the TV.

31 DEC. 17, 2006 *Saturday Night Live* airs digital short "Lazy Sunday," starring Chris Parnell and newcomer Andy Samberg, garnering 5 million hits on YouTube and paving the way for such classics as Natalie Portman's "Natalie Raps" and Justin Timberlake's "Dick in a Box."

2007

43 APRIL 2, 2008 U.S. District Judge Loretta Preska dismisses businessman Jeffrey Lemerond's lawsuit against 20th Century Fox for Sacha Baron Cohen's *Borat* mockumentary. Lemerond had claimed that his image was unlawfully used when the film depicted him running down Fifth Avenue yelling "go away" to avoid a hug from Borat.

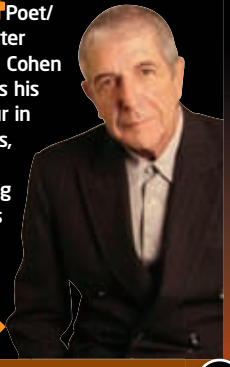
42 APRIL 1, 2008 R.E.M. releases *Accelerate*, their first solid album in more than 10 years, bringing them back from the brink of being has-been rockers.

41 DEC. 21, 2007 After a long, dubious ban, absinthe—drink of impressionist artists and over-funded Americans in Europe—returns to U.S. shelves.

40 NOV. 30, 2007 Michael Jackson's immortal album *Thriller* celebrates its 25th anniversary. *Paste* commemorates the occasion with a sequined glove on the cover of issue #40.

2008

44 MAY 11, 2008 Poet/songwriter Leonard Cohen launches his first tour in 15 years, after returning from his trip to Mount Baldy.



45 JUNE 13, 2008 Politically charged rapper M.I.A. performs at Bonnaroo and announces several-tiered "retirement," just as she crosses over with "Paper Planes."

46 JULY 6, 2008 Longtime *Paste* favorites The Avett Brothers announce they've signed with American Recordings, whose legendary proprietor Rick Rubin will produce their forthcoming fifth LP.

19 **NOV. 12, 2004** Indie-rock darlings Death Cab For Cutie ink a multi-album major-label deal with Atlantic Records.

20 **JAN. 21, 2005** Paul Giamatti stars in cross-over hit *Sideways*, exemplifying the emergence of indie film as a force in mainstream cinema.

21 **FEB 15, 2005** YouTube.com goes online, forever altering home video, music-video distribution, politics, filmmaking, television's shelf-life and so much more.

2005

22 **MARCH 24, 2005** NBC's *The Office* debuts, becoming a sitcom classic despite long odds that it could rival the BBC original.

23 **JULY 5, 2005** Sufjan Stevens releases breakthrough album *Illinois*. Fans begin long, unrequited wait for *Delaware*, *Oregon* or any other state-related follow-up.

24 **FEB. 10, 2006** Opposite the Opening Ceremonies of the 2006 Torino Winter Olympics, FOX airs the final four episodes of *Paste*'s favorite show, *Arrested Development*.

32 **APRIL 3, 2007** Roberto Bolaño's *The Savage Detectives* hits the U.S. in Natasha Wimmer's English translation, establishing the author as a huge cross-over success. The literary world goes nuts, overuses (and misapplies) Gabriel García Márquez comparisons.

33 **JUNE 29, 2007** Apple releases the iPhone. Life becomes more entertaining for some 12 million people.

34 **JULY 10, 2007** Patton Oswalt releases comedy album *Werewolves and Lollipops*, cementing the relevance of an emerging comedy scene that also includes groundbreaking new stylists such as Eugene Mirman and Zach Galifianakis.

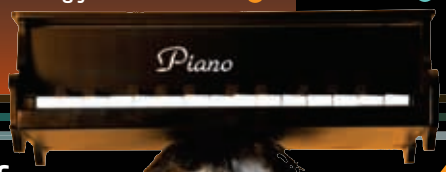
35 **JULY 21, 2007** J.K. Rowling's seventh and final Harry Potter book, *Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*, shatters first-day publication records. More than 11 million copies sell worldwide, with 300,000 per hour in the United States. The sales are so huge that the movie adaptation of the fifth Potter book sees a drop in business while people are busy reading.

39 **NOV. 21, 2007** Todd Haynes adds to the myth of Bob Dylan with his brilliant, maddening biopic *I'm Not There*.

38 **NOV. 19, 2007** Amazon debuts the Kindle, a gadget allowing users to buy and store books, magazines and newspapers on a handheld device.

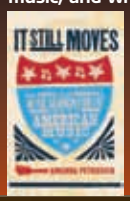
37 **OCT. 1, 2007** Out of their record-label contract, Radiohead announces that new album *In Rainbows* will be available 10 days later on Oct. 10, through their own website, with a pay-what-you-want sales model. A certain indie entertainment magazine lovingly borrows the idea.

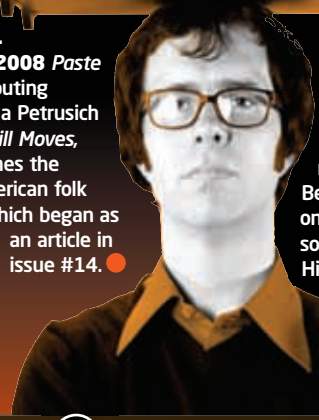
36 **SEPT. 11, 2007** In a world-class promotional stunt, rap superstars Kanye West and 50 Cent release albums on the same day to see who can sell more. Kanye's victory cripples 50's career.



47 **JULY 18, 2008** After the shocking early death of star Heath Ledger, *The Dark Knight* opens to critical acclaim and Academy Award buzz for Ledger. *Dark Knight* goes on to be only the second picture to reach the $500 million mark in the U.S., breaking numerous other records along the way.

48 **AUG. 19, 2008** *Paste* senior contributing editor Amanda Petrusich releases *It Still Moves*, which examines the future of American folk music, and which began as an article in issue #14.





49 **SEPT. 18, 2008** *Paste* #15 cover star Ben Folds reunites his trio Ben Folds Five for one MySpace-sponsored show in Chapel Hill, N.C., the band's first gig since breaking up in 2000.

50 **NOV. 4, 2008** *Paste* publishes its 50th Issue Lovefest, featuring "50 Great Moments in Our Magazine's Lifetime," which you just finished reading.

2009

CONTRIBUTING: JEFFREY BLOOMER, HENRY FREEDLAND, PALMER HOUCHINS, JOSH JACKSON, STEVE LABATE, LOREN LANKFORD, RACHAEL MADDUX, NICK MARINO, JEREMY MEDINA, NICK PURDY

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ISSUE 50

1 THE GUGGENHEIM GROTTO

"Fee Da Da Dee" (K. May / M. Lynch) from *Happy the Man*. ℗2009 The Guggenehim Grotto. Courtesy of United For Opportunity. **Hometown:** Dublin, Ireland **Website:** guggenheimgrotto.com

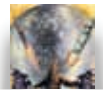
2 KYLE ANDREWS

"Sushi" (K. Andrews) from *Real Blasty*. ℗2008 Elephant Lady Music (BMI). **Hometown:** Nashville **Website:** kyleandrews.com

3 NEKO CASE

"People Got a Lot of Nerve" (N. Case) from *Middle Cyclone*. ℗2008 Nedotykoma (SOCAN / ASCAP). Courtesy of ANTI-. **Hometown:** Tucson, Ariz. **Website:** nekocase.com **(PG. 34)**

4 N.A.S.A. FEAT. TOM WAITS & KOOL KEITH



"Spacious Thoughts" (Spiegel / Gonzalez / Keith / Waits) from *The Spirit of Apollo*. ℗2008 Maestrobyte Publishing / Kohaw Music (ASCAP) / Reverend Tom Music (ASCAP) / Notting Hill Music Ltd. - The Bicycle Music Company Jalma Music. Courtesy of ANTI-. **Hometowns:** Los Angeles; Sao Paulo, Brazil **Website:** myspace.com/northamericasouthamerica

5 HEARTLESS BASTARDS

"The Mountain" (E. Wennerstrom) from *The Mountain*. ℗2008 Fat Possum Records. **Hometown:** Austin, Texas **Website:** myspace.com/heartlessbastards **(PG. 57)**

6 THE CHAMPION AND HIS BURNING FLAME

"The Expert" (T. Nyman / D. Arnold) from *The French EP*. ℗2008 Distant Second Music (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Nashville **Website:** thechampionandhisburningflame.com

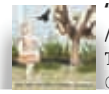
7 DENT MAY & HIS MAGNIFICENT UKULELE

"Meet Me In The Garden" (D. May) from *The Good Feeling Music of Dent May & His Magnificent Ukulele*. ℗2009 Paw Tracks. **Hometown:** Taylor, Miss. **Website:** dentmay.com **(PG. 54)**

8 M. WARD

"Never Had Nobody Like You" (M. Ward) From *Hold Time*. ℗2009 Crooked Spine Publishing (ASCAP). Courtesy of Merge Records. **Hometown:** Portland, Ore. **Website:** mwardmusic.com **(PG. 53)**

9 ONE DAY INTERNATIONAL



"Black Is The Bird" (Lunson / Curran / Snow / O'Grady / Turner / Crosby) from *Blackbird*. ℗2008 (IMRO). Courtesy of Independent Records Ireland. **Hometown:** Dublin, Ireland **Website:** onedayinternationalmusic.com

10 SHUGO TOKUMARU

"Parachute" (S. Tokumaru) from *Exit*. ℗Blues Interactions, Inc. Under exclusive license to Sony BMG Music Entertainment. Courtesy of Startime International. **Hometown:** Tokyo **Website:** shugotokumaru.com **(PG. 20)**

11 DEATH ON TWO WHEELS

"Calling Us Back Home" (T. Vedder) from *Separation of Church and Fate* (ASCAP). Courtesy of The Ghost Umbrella. **Hometown:** Atlanta **Website:** deathontwowheels.com **(PG. 56)**

12 ANDREW BIRD

"Oh No" (A. Bird) from *Noble Beast*. ℗2008 Vegoawam Music. Courtesy of Fat Possum Records. **Hometown:** Chicago **Website:** andrewbird.net **(PG. 50)**

13 UMPHREY'S MCGEE

"Made To Measure" (J. Cinninger / B. Bayliss / J. Cummins) from *Mantis*. ℗2009 Hanging Brains Music (ASCAP). Courtesy of SCI Fidelity Records. **Hometown:** Chicago **Website:** umphreys.com

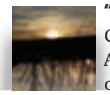
14 BEATBEAT WHISPER

"Mismanaged Skies" (D. Nereo) from *Wonder Continental*. ℗2008. ℗Beatbeat Whisper. Courtesy of Beatbeat Whisper. **Hometown:** Oakland, Calif. **Website:** beatbeatwhisper.com **(PG. 20)**

15 COURTNEY JAYE

"I Need Love" (T. Cockrell) from *Queen of Sabotage*. ℗2008 Little Hoss Pulishing / Razor & Tie (SESAC). Courtesy of Pele Records. **Hometowns:** Kauai, Hawaii / Nashville **Website:** courtneyjaye.com

16 ANTHONY GREEN

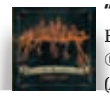


"Miracle Sun (remix)" (A. Green) from *Avalon*. ℗2008 Anthony Green Music. Courtesy of Photo Finish Records. Previously unreleased remix by Colin Frangicetto. **Hometown:** Doylestown, Pa. **Website:** anthonygreenschildren.com

17 TINA DICO

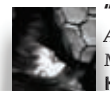
"No Time To Sleep" (T. Dico) from *A Beginning, A Detour, An Open Ending*. ℗2009 Kobalt Music Publishing. Courtesy of Defend Music, Inc. **Hometown:** London **Website:** tinadico.com

18 DAVID BERKELEY



"Willis Avenue Bridge" (D. Berkeley) from *Strange Light*. ℗2009 Straw Man Publishing (ASCAP). Courtesy of Straw Man Music. **Hometown:** Brooklyn, N.Y. **Website:** davidberkeley.com **(PG. 21)**

19 WAITING FOR IRIS



"Letting Go" (J. Kettering) from *Apology*. ℗2005 RGK Heartbeat Music (ASCAP). **Hometown:** Nashville **Website:** myspace.com/waitingforiris

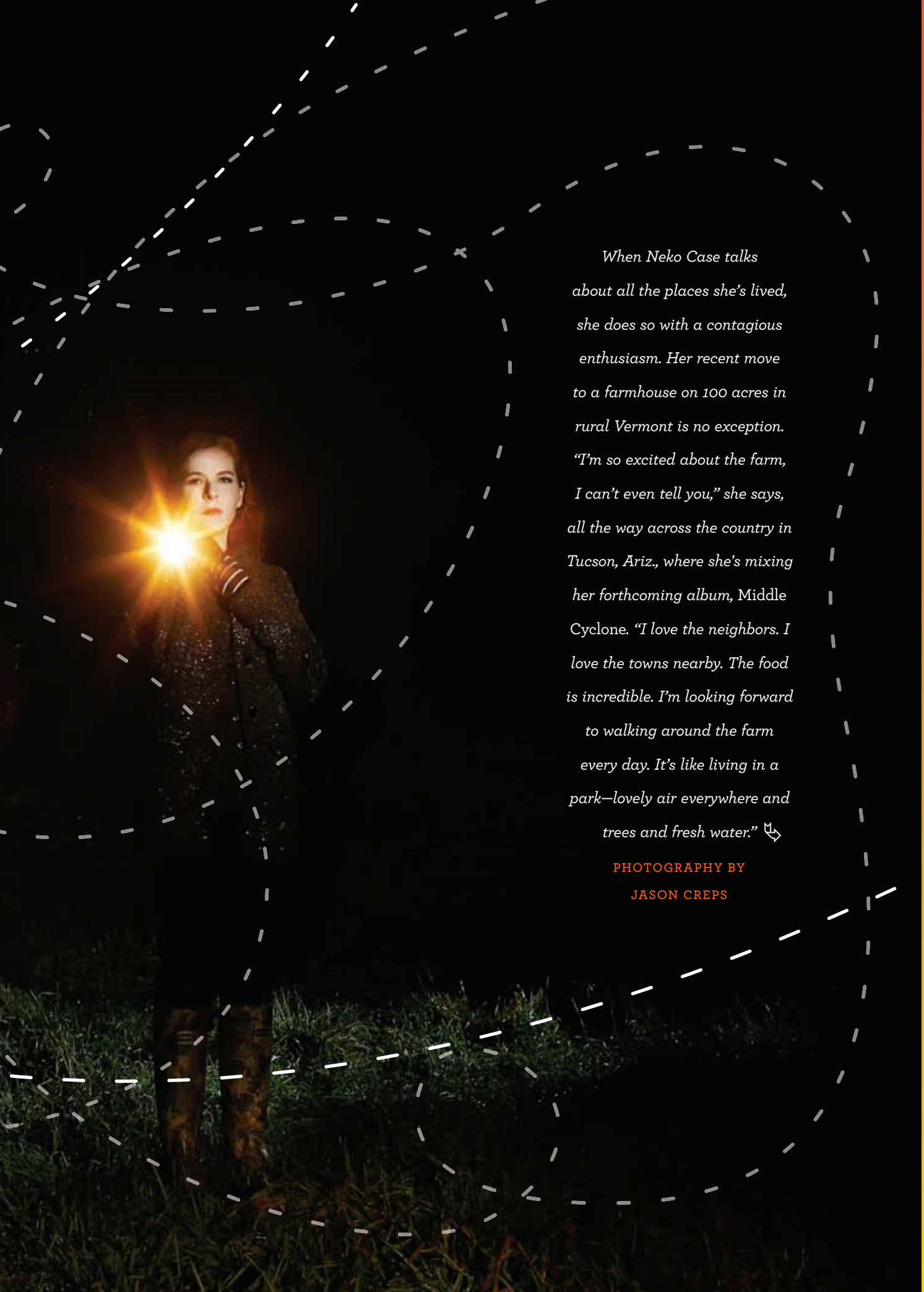
OURSTAGE WINNER

20 JOSH RITTER

"Wildfires" (J. Ritter) from *Live at the 9:30 Club (Irish Edition)* ℗Josh Ritter / Rural Songs (ASCAP). Courtesy of Independent Records Ireland (Not Available in the U.S.) **Hometown:** Moscow, Idaho **Website:** joshritter.com

THIS SYMBOL INDICATES AN ARTIST APPEARING ON THIS MONTH'S SAMPLER

neko case
drives us batty



When Neko Case talks about all the places she's lived, she does so with a contagious enthusiasm. Her recent move to a farmhouse on 100 acres in rural Vermont is no exception. "I'm so excited about the farm, I can't even tell you," she says, all the way across the country in Tucson, Ariz., where she's mixing her forthcoming album, Middle Cyclone. *"I love the neighbors. I love the towns nearby. The food is incredible. I'm looking forward to walking around the farm every day. It's like living in a park—lovely air everywhere and trees and fresh water."*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY
JASON CREPS

But the dairy cows that once roamed the pastures are long gone, and the Morgan horses that lived in the barn are now buried underneath the orchard. Instead, the 18th-century structure houses pianos. Lots of them. "We decided it would be really hilarious to see how many free pianos we could get off of Craigslist," she says. "I was like, 'Well, I have a barn.' I ended up with eight, and that's when I came up with the idea for the piano orchestra."

¶ The "orchestra"—Case, along with various friends and her New Pornographers bandmates—appears on three songs on Middle Cyclone. *The album, her fifth studio LP, also features the farm's chorus of frogs on final track "Marais La Nuit." Aside from her new digs,* Paste *wondered what else this redheaded songwriter loves. So we asked her.*

17 things i ❤

by Neko Case

1. CANADA (and the Canadians therein)

I just spent two months living in Toronto mixing my album. I sure did miss it! I haven't lived there since '98, so it was good to get back for an extended stay. The ladies who work upstairs in the studio had an election party. They weren't kidding. Canada was voting Obama with bells on. People were crying and cheering, not just in our little corner, but all over the country. Canada was really rooting for us. I felt like the world still loved us after all. It was even more moving than I imagined it could be.

2. HONEYCRISP APPLES

Rock 'n' roll is wild. Believe everything you hear about it.

3. MY BAND

What can I say?! They're adorable.

4. BATS

There's a bridge by my house under which live trillions of Mexican free-tailed bats. I walk my dogs down there a lot and visit them. If you stand still with a flashlight, they fly really close all around you and make excellent squeaking noises. Sometimes they'll graze my arm with a damp little wing. I love that. They eat about 1,500 mosquitoes a night each! Bats are having a hard time, though—pollution, habitat loss and wind farms (huge turbines, also detrimental to birds and many other sensitive, threatened animal species) are really taking a toll. Imagine what would happen if we had no bats! Think of the mosquito-borne diseases that would explode—West Nile, malaria. You can help fight these diseases by putting up a bat house. Make sure you're going green in a responsible way, and question things. The word "green" has become a major marketing catchphrase that's sometimes used deceptively. Don't jump on board for "clean" energy if it ruins other things. Wind power is great; wind farms are bad. Do lots of research and tell your local and national governments what you want. Bats and birds can't type, so help them out. [si.edu/Encyclopedia_SI/nmnh/batfacts.htm and betterplan.squarespace.com]

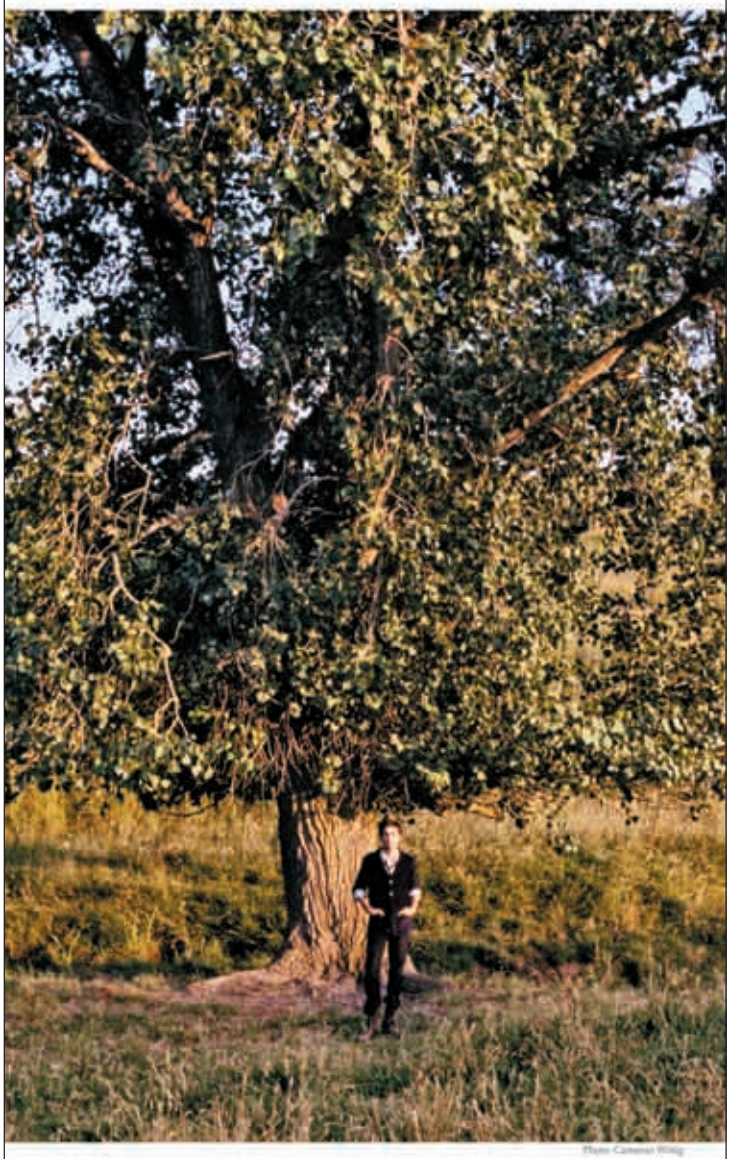
5. MY PETS

Yeah, yeah, I know. You don't wanna hear it. I can't help it though; it's been a tough year. One of my dogs, Travis, lost a leg to cancer. Funny thing is, he couldn't care less. He's almost as fast as he was on the track. It's mind-blowing to watch a greyhound—even a three-legged one—at full speed! Dogs live for today. I love them for that. I didn't make you watch any of this on YouTube, so we're even.

6. *HOBBY FARMS* MAGAZINE

Who likes to read about goats? I do! You know, the Caprine subfamily? Lowline cattle, anyone? Weeder geese? Guinea hens on tick patrol? Mini donks? Draft horse logging? That's what I'm talking about.

Andrew Bird
NOBLE BEAST



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7. BOOKS I READ WHILE MAKING THIS RECORD

You always need a book to accompany you on a journey, to put your own journey in perspective. Here are the books that kept me company while working on *Middle Cyclone*:

THE LIVING by Annie Dillard

I love Dillard's writing. Invisible to the story, she inhabits both men and women with no bias. I earmarked so many pages. I couldn't help but go back and re-read all the flawless passages and odd, mouthwatering descriptions. It took me a long time to come down from this book, and its characters are still hanging around. The story takes place in Whatcom County in Washington state where most of my family lives. You don't read many stories about this place, so I'm really grateful.

WATERSHIP DOWN by Richard Adams

This classic changed my life. It made me the ravenous reader I am today. It's even better when you read it as an adult. Hazel and Fiver are always with me. *Watership* is based on a story about rabbits that Adams made up for his daughters on a road trip. It's so intricate and engrossing. There are so many stories within the story; there's even a mythology for rabbits. I wish he was my dad.

UP IN THE OLD HOTEL
by Joseph Mitchell

Little portraits of old New York, written in the cleanest, most matter-of-fact style. Mitchell is so dry and funny. The characters are vivid and salty, like potato chips. You can't put this book down.

FLIGHT by Sherman Alexie

Heartbreaking and beautiful. Sherman Alexie is pretty much my favorite writer. He says it all so plainly and poetically and goes to strange and funny places with such seemingly unlikely characters, and makes them the likeliest ever in the process. He just won the National Book Award for *The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian*. Way to go, Sherman!

WISE CHILDREN by Angela Carter

Sally Timms of the Mekons turned me on to Angela Carter some years ago. They're a lot alike, I think. Sally bought me a copy of *Nights at the Circus*, and I've never looked back. Carter is brilliant, nimble and hilarious. I cracked up in a lot of restaurants while reading this one.

WHAT IT IS by Lynda Barry

The most generous book my eyes have ever feasted on. Not only is it filled with nutritious information, it's also crammed with paintings, drawings and collages. The book is based on Barry's class, called "Writing the Unthinkable." I've taken the class several times, and I can testify firsthand that this book does it justice. It makes you want to make stuff right now! It's gorgeous, funny and bizarre all at the same time. If you ever have a creative logjam, Barry is the beaver to talk to about clearing it out.

MISS NOBODY by Tomek Tryzna

This book was written by a Polish guy about being a young teenage girl. No kid's book, it's twisted and real. It's the best description I've ever read of the shitty-ness of being a teenage girl. The politics, how it feels to be poor, how it feels to be poor in front of rich girls, friendships, double crosses and intrigue. It's like *The Living* in that it has you by the throat long after you've finished it. It's out of print, but you can still get it at AbeBooks.com for cheap.

"Chicks on one side, men on the other = lame. I want my music all-in."

8. ICED TEA
Don't put tropical shit in it! Hold the sugar, *svp*.

9. *THE MIGHTY BOOSH*
Why hasn't this British comedy show been released in the United States yet?!

10. EVERYONE WHO VOTED
Yes, you. I don't even care who you voted for. You voted. I'm so proud! Now we need to get Canadians to start voting—help me out!

11. *WEIRD SCIENCE*
My favorite John Hughes movie. Best watched when super-tired. I love the line where Kelly LeBrock is yelling at Wyatt's grandpa, saying, "You can't just go around hitting people with your Rex Harrison hat!" And who can forget Chet?

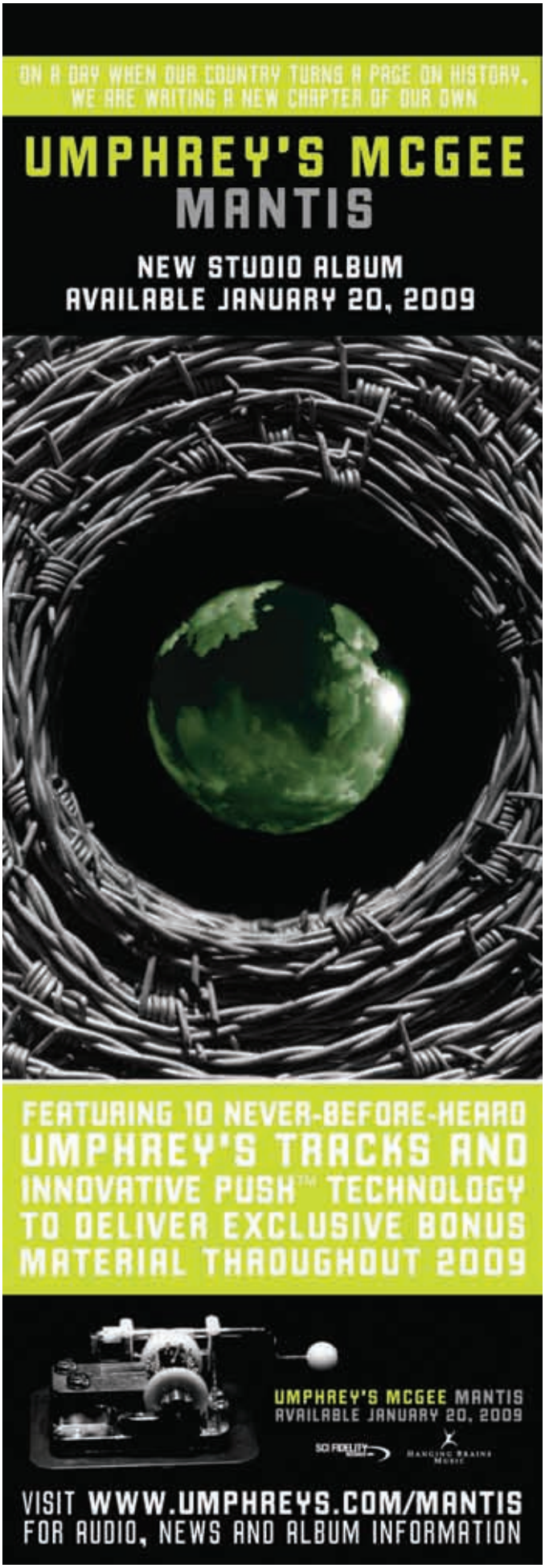
12. PAINTINGS BY AMY CASEY
Sometimes when you are making something (in this case, a record), you find another artist by accident who spurs you on. I ran across Amy's paintings in a magazine. I was so excited and freaked out. I contacted her gallery and asked if I could use some images for artwork on my CD. She said yes! We have since shared Hungarian food, and I had an amazing dream where I was going to see her band play and I got in a fight with a random lady who peed on the toilet seat. Amy is very soft-spoken, funny and paints buildings like they're living, feeling things. [amycaseypainting.com]

13. PAINTINGS BY SIDNEY NOLAN
He's an Australian genius with a Ned Kelly obsession. His paintings are like twisted folk songs with beautiful colors. He doesn't shy away from the grizzly, either. I saw some of his paintings at the Art Gallery of South Australia in Adelaide. I loved them so much I had to go back twice on the same trip. Then I had to read *True History of the Kelly Gang* by Peter Carey. See how art does that? It just keeps showing you new and exciting things! [pictureaustralia.org/nolan]

14. NICK CAVE AND WARREN ELLIS SOUNDTRACKS
No one can create a cinematic mood like these two. The soundtracks for *The Proposition* (a great movie also written by Nick Cave) and *The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford* are both juicy. I love to put these on while I work.

15. CO-ED ROCK 'N' ROLL
Chicks on one side, men on the other = lame. I want my music all-in. I'm not talking about tough-as-hell all-girl bands, just the "women only" camps. They want in your wallet! It's a gimmick where the joke's on the ladies. Nine times out of 10 it's a man's idea anyway—some lawyer, promoter or manager. Let's just balance it out by adding more ladies to bands with guys. Then, we all win.

16. *SAVEUR* MAGAZINE
Amazing food pornography. And facts.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17

REMEMBERING MY DREAMS

I think this may be my very favorite thing on Earth. I have a lot of dreams where people who've passed away call me on the phone. It's always a grey princess phone. Hmm. I had a dream where I worked in a jack-off parlor. Is there even such a thing as a "jack-off parlor?" I didn't actually see any of that go down in the dream; it was more about observing little details about my co-workers, who were a surly bunch of girls. A lot of the songs on my record come from dreams—"This Tornado Loves You" and "Prison Girls" both. Once I dreamt I was getting it on with Steve Earle and Madonna. She told me my hair looked like a wig. I had a dream where Jim James from My Morning Jacket and my friend Jocelyne were driving around in a beat up Smart car looking for an elephant that had gotten loose from a local farm. I guess Jocelyne was going to lead the elephant home by his leash out the window. Jim was using only a walkie-talkie to communicate, even to speak to Jocelyne, who was sitting right next to him—in a Smart car! It was awesome. I could go on. But the best dream I've had lately was where my grandma called me on the grey princess phone, and I answered it in the middle of a big green pasture. She passed away a year ago, but she was calling to tell me she was feeling much better and wanted me to know she was looking out for me. She said she was traveling through Thailand and having a ball; in fact she had to go so she wouldn't miss her connection. "Wait!" I said, "Do you have anything else to tell me?" She thought about it for quite a while. She finally answered in a soft and serious tone, "Make sure you have your say." She said it like she was telling everyone, so I thought I should let you know. —*Love N*

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IN THE MIDDLE OF THE CYCLONE WITH NEKO CASE

BY JOSH JACKSON

PASTE: What was going through your head as you were writing these songs?

NEKO CASE: Well, as I was writing them, I didn't really know what was going through my head. And that's the way it always starts out. But when I got a little ways in, I realized I had a bit of an obsession with tornadoes. And I realized I was writing popular songs, and decided to have some choruses on this record. I also realized that since *Fox Confessor*, I'd said a lot that I don't write love songs—I just don't like to do it. But I ended up writing lots of love songs. If you say you don't want to do something, you're going to contradict yourself later. It always happens. They're still not traditional love songs, but they're love songs nonetheless.

P: Where did the obsession with tornadoes come from?

NC: I really don't know. I had a dream one night about a tornado. It was a really interesting dream, and ever since then I've been thinking about them. I realized that a lot of the songs have tornadoes in them without even realizing that I was doing that.

P: And on "This Tornado Loves You," who is this tornado?

NC: It's quite literally a tornado. It's a literal story about a tornado in love with a person. That's what the dream was about. It wasn't me that the tornado was in love with; it was kind of a kid. It was a strange story, but I was pretty moved by it.

P: It sounds like something that could have been a part of *Fox Confessor*.

NC: Yeah, I'm still very much interested in fairy tales. But I think it's more about writing new fairy tales. These are now fairy tales with little love stories in them, I suppose. They're a little less cautionary and a little more personal.

P: How did you want to approach the desire for poppier songs and choruses in the studio?

NC: I think that a lot of that desire came from just playing with The New Pornographers so much, and making their last couple records. Gang singing is a great effect, and it's a really fun time. I just realized that it's going to take a lot of singing and a couple of major chords, for a change, rather than just minor chords all the time. [Major chords after minor chords are] like you just poked your head out of the water after holding your breath.

P: You've said in the past that you're a little bit of a control freak. With all these amazing musicians like M. Ward, Sarah Harmer and Lucy Wainwright Roche, plus folks from Calexico, The Sadies and The New Pornographers all coming in, how did you balance that?

NC: Well, I think my control freakness doesn't translate into telling other people what to do so much as just having to be there for every second of everything that happens. "Control freak," as in I don't want to miss any of the mixing, mastering. Some people give that stuff away to other people to do, but I can't do it. The people that I ask to play on it, I don't ever worry about them. Sometimes I tell them what to do, but usually it's just, "more of that!"

P: Do you find that that's a time of special camaraderie, when you're in a studio environment like that?

NC: Yeah, absolutely. I'm not one of those people that can make a record in two weeks. I take a really long time, so I try to make sure that it's a fun time in my life and not just two weeks of boom, boom, boom, boom. We try and go out and have great dinners and go see movies and shows, and walk around and drink tea together.

ONLINE Read the whole conversation at pastemagazine.com/February09

by Owen King

OBJECTS OF THEIR AFFECTION

After winning a 2006 Golden Globe for his co-screenwriting on *Brokeback Mountain*, novelist Larry McMurtry caused a certain amount of confusion when his acceptance speech deviated from the familiar litany of award-show thank yous. Instead of acknowledging the usual suspects—mom, dad, husband, wife, agent, stylist, Jesus, etc.—McMurtry made the following statement: "Most heartfelt, I thank my typewriter. My typewriter is a Hermes 3000, surely one of the noblest instruments of European genius."

No one seemed to know what to make of this eloquent appreciation. Was McMurtry joking? Was he sending a message in code? Was he just weird? The subtext of this speculation—that a man couldn't be sincerely grateful to a typewriter—is that an artist can make do with any old instrument. ¶ In a conversation with mandolin virtuoso Chris Thile (formerly of Nickel Creek), the essential fault of such a premise becomes apparent. Thile can still remember—in a scenario straight out of a Merle Haggard song—how it felt when he learned that his favorite mandolin had been sold to a "fellow in Kansas City." "It was," he says, "like watching the girl you let get away and go marry some other guy." ¶ A sorrowful picture emerges: Some shark-toothed dandy, a rose pinned to his lapel and a straw boater propped on his head, sits behind the wheel of a ragtop convertible. In the passenger seat beside him is a mandolin, draped in a white veil. The dandy hits the gas and the convertible rips down the open road, chased by a tail of clanging cans, while the veil unfurls in the wind, the mandolin's strings rippling a twang of farewell. Can you imagine what that felt like? Put your constant companion, your chief collaborator, your best voice, in that passenger seat. And imagine that companion whisked away by a man from Kansas City. ¶ What McMurty indicated—and what all the artists featured here make clear—is that instruments are more than mere utensils, more than a means to an end. They are irreplaceable halves in partnerships as unique as any other love affair. ¶ Poet Christina Rossetti writes, "For one is both and both are one in love." Bon Scott implores us, "Pick up your balls and load up your cannon for a twenty-one gun salute." The following rock 'n' roll soldiers are nothing if not "one in love" with their cannons. Here is our salute.

FIVE MUSICIANS AND THE INSTRUMENTS THEY LOVE

Photography by Jayme Thorton

CHRIS THILE & BOSTY MCTRIPLET

THILE AND HIS DUDENBOSTEL MANDOLIN first met in 1998. Built by Lynn "Bosty" Dudenbostel, and nicknamed after its owner's fondness for extended solos ("McTriplet"), the instrument, Thile says, "was just so, so balanced and responsive," with a "low-end, round, whole sound"—a sound that should be familiar to anyone who's heard Nickel Creek set a match to Britney Spears' "Toxic." Like most relationships, however, this one has had its share of near misses. Thile originally commissioned Dudenbostel to construct a mandolin to his own specifications—Bosty McTriplet was a loaner. After playing it for about two years, Thile handed Bosty over for the new mandolin that had been designed for him. But it wasn't the same. What was so different? "Sound. The feel. The way the neck felt. There are so many different things about an instrument. ... It's the same thing with [a person's] character—it's infinitely nuanced." As the arranged marriage between Thile and his new mandolin began to founder, Dudenbostel sold Bosty McTriplet to another buyer, the dreaded "fellow from Kansas City." This seemed to rule out any sort of future reunion between the mandolinist and his true love—until the prized instrument, astonishingly, landed back on the market. Thile bought it. Now, he says, they're forever: "I'll tell you what I could never imagine, is letting it go. I will always own this mandolin."

AMANDA PALMER & THE KURZWEIL

A LONGTIME FAN OF THE COMPOSER OF THE *THREEPENNY OPERA*, Palmer has rearranged the letters on the front of her Kurzweil PC3 keyboard to read, "Kurt Weill." Palmer—half of cabaret-punk duo The Dresden Dolls, and more recently on the road in support of her solo debut—was concerned that the Kurzweil people "were going to ask me to stop changing the letters on the keyboard, but they were like, 'No, no, no, go ahead and do it. It's totally rock 'n' roll, and we love it!'" And yet, while she's grateful for the Kurzweil's durability ("it takes a beating gratefully," Palmer laughs), she's never entirely gotten over the Steinway of her youth. "That piano and I went through hell and back together when I was a teenager. I learned how to play on it, I composed all my early songs on it, I went to it in times of need and solace. I think my heart is still tangled up in the strings of that original piano."

IN 2007, MASH-UP SPECIALIST GREGG GILLIS SENT THREE LAPTOPS TO THEIR ETERNAL REST. His performances—during which he invites the audience to join him on stage—are insane loop-fueled bacchanals where one's personal hygiene, and certainly one's personal computer, are at continuous risk. Gillis' laptop, which is the only instrument at a Girl Talk show, "sits on stage with a few hundred sweaty people jumping around, potentially jumping on it, potentially sweating [on it], puking, drinking, [potentially spilling] all sorts of bodily fluids all over it." So Gillis has upped the ante and turned to a Panasonic Toughbook-74, a heavy-duty laptop intended for military use. He describes a show in Tulsa where the table beneath the Toughbook collapsed, and he landed on top of it. "The back part of the computer completely cracked," Gillis says, sounding wistful. "But the laptop did not hesitate at all." Now, he declares, "I'm Gregg Gillis and the computer is Girl Talk."

GREGG GILLIS & GIRL TALK

ANI DIFRANCO & SMOKY

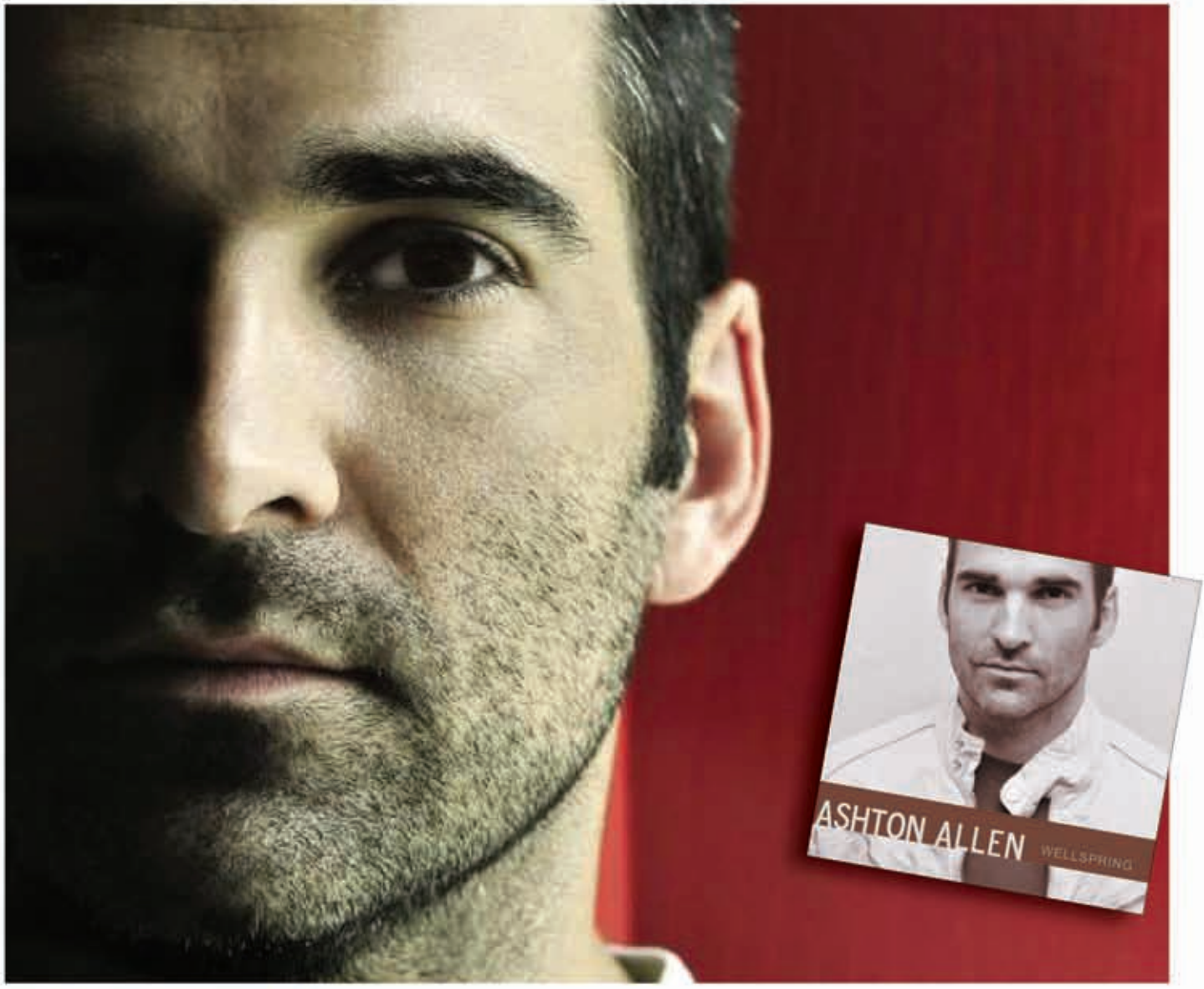
WHEN IT COMES TO HER GUITARS, Ani DiFranco isn't exactly monogamous. "Some musicians have *an* axe," she says, "and it's a very intimate relationship. For me, I'm always playing a different guitar." In fact, she likes to lend them out. "I think that the more experiences a guitar has, the more it's played, the happier it is." Her vintage four-string Epiphone tenor is one among many favorites, a gift from Scot Fisher, president of DiFranco's label, Righteous Babe Records. "A guitar doesn't come from the factory with a soul," DiFranco says. "So a lot of the guitars I play on stage are earning their soul right now. But this one came to me with a vibe in it. ... [It] has a kind of more middy, honkier, narrow sound"—recalling, in DiFranco's mind, nothing so much as a marvelously sassy goose.

ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO & HIS GIBSON 339

IN THE STORY OF ALEJANDRO ESCOVEDO AND HIS GIBSON 339, Keith Richards cameos as a grizzled rock 'n' roll cupid. It was the sight of Richards on the gatefold of the Rolling Stones' *Big Hits (High Tide and Green Grass)* that set off Escovedo's lifelong love affair with Gibson guitars. "He's wearing blue sunglasses and he's holding this beautiful Hummingbird," Escovedo says. "And I just always loved the sound of those Gibsons on those Stones records." Although Escovedo's 339 is only about a year old (bought as a replacement for the '56 Gibson J-45 that had been his companion for many years), his connection to the new six-string was immediate. "I knew as soon as I picked it up, basically. I just knew it." As Escovedo describes the 339's qualities—the woody tone, the way it jangles, how it can "roar when you need it"—it becomes easy to appreciate the old saw "it takes an experienced eye to truly value a thing of beauty."

ONLINE To see more from our photo shoots with these five artists, visit pastemagazine.com/February09

Discover Ashton Allen



DISCOVER Great New Music

We created *Discover Great New Music* because we like introducing our customers to emerging artists. Every quarter, we select 12 new albums from artists we think you should hear. For the second time, singer/songwriter/producer Ashton Allen is our selection. His whispery, folk-rock sound resonates with heartfelt harmonies on a blend of tracks that are both mellow and upbeat. *Wellspring*, his dynamic follow-up to the indie-pop hit, *Dewdrops*—and a Barnes & Noble Exclusive—showcases his breezy, feel-good voice on an intimate collection of multi-layered songs and is destined to become a classic.

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THE PASTE RECKONING

R.E.M. → 60

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50-74 RESPECTABLE | **75-90** COMMENDABLE | **91-100** PHENOMENAL

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NEW MUSIC

Andrew Bird is back with a confusing new record. **Plus:** Animal Collective, Buddy & Julie Miller, Franz Ferdinand, M. Ward, John Legend, Antony & The Johnsons, Kid Sister.

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REISSUES

R.E.M.'s debut LP, *Murmur*, and Death Cab For Cutie's *Something About Airplanes* celebrate their 25th and and 10th anniversaries, respectively. **Plus:** Ween live at The Cat's Cradle.

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FILM

Kate Winslet and Leonardo DiCaprio reunite in Oscar hopeful *Revolutionary Road*, and Dustin Hoffman and Emma Thompson star in rom-com *Last Chance Harvey*. **Plus:** *Che* and *Gomorrah*.

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DVDs

Coen Bros. CIA flick *Burn After Reading* is funny but forgettable, and *The Secret Policeman's Balls* are finally available in North America. **Plus:** *The Dark Knight* and *The Tudors*.

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BOOKS

Acclaimed novelist Toni Morrison bravely re-opens the wound of American slavery. **Plus:** James Sullivan's biography of the late James Brown.

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GAMES

Innovative first-person adventue *Mirror's Edge* deftly explores the politics of fear and homeland security. **Plus:** The karaoke game that plugs into your iPod.

WILD BIRD CHASE

Whistling wonder's latest requires more work than usual

BY KATE KIEFER

ANDREW BIRD

Noble Beast FAT POSSUM

Andrew Bird has always been a bit of a showoff. For good reason, though—he's an incredible violinist and composer, he knows big words like *apocrypha*, and anyone who can make a human whistle sound like the wind, a voice, a theremin and a saw, might as well prove it.

Here, Bird's arrangements are uncharacteristically subtle. Trademark orchestral swells take the backburner to confident vocals, easy melodies, guitar plucking and—yes—freakishly good whistling. Subtle doesn't always mean boring, though. The catchy chorus of "Fitz and the Dizzyspells" could turn doing the dishes, driving to work or sitting on the couch into exciting and triumphant experiences, and "Effigy" is perfectly understated, from the somber melody and intricate guitar picking to the cute rhyme of "affable" and "laughable."

Still, there are a few awkward moments—the flamenco guitars feel tacked-on sometimes, and Bird's urgent, repetitive wail on the aptly titled "Not A Robot, But A Ghost" too closely recalls Thom Yorke. For someone who practically invented his own genre, Bird seems to forget himself here. Same goes for "Nomenclature," on which he sounds like a dead-ringer for Rufus Wainwright. He successfully pulls off the cabaret sound, and the song is charming, but it offers nothing new. And the record starts to run together toward the end, beginning with minute-long violin meander "Unfolding Fans."

Bird's cutback in musical drama inadvertently begs for a sharper focus on individual parts, including the lyrics, their grandiosity making up for the music's lack thereof—and then some. But listen too hard, and his words turn into flashing lights.

You might start by looking up the word *radiolarian*. The dictionary says it's a *protozoan*. So you look up protozoan and

learn that it's a *eukaryote*. Before you know it you're looking up *organelle* and *cytoplasm* and eventually end up with the word *cell*—you're pretty sure that radiolarian isn't a fancy way of saying cell, but you're kind of pissed off that a lyric sent you on such a goose chase, plus, now you feel stupid and don't even care what the word means anymore. And if it were just that one trip-up, it'd be no big deal. But there's more where it came from—to name quite a few: *aubergine* (French for "eggplant"); *proto-Sanskrit* (the hypothetical ancestor of the Indo-European language); *Cypriot* (inhabitant of Cyprus); *Uralic* (a family of languages to which Hungarian, Finnish and Estonian belong, comprising Finno-Ugric and Samoyed as subfamilies); *troglobite* (cave-dwelling creature); *plecostomus* (type of Central and South American fish); *anthurium* (a kind of plant); *pleurisy* (inflammation of the *pleura*, which is a membrane in mammal lungs); *valerian* (another plant); and *dermestid* (something about beetles).

The lyrical confusion doesn't end there. Some words aren't even definable (*Hobishot*?), and chinless men are scratching their beards, and someone's "wearing nothing but a onesie and a veil," and eggplants are dreaming, and people are having "fake conversations on nonexistent telephones." It's not merely challenging—it's a real *gluteal throe* (pain in the ass).

There's nothing wrong with having to refer to the dictionary every once in a while, but Bird's constant textbookish references make it almost impossible to connect with whatever sentiments lie beneath his gratuitous wordplay, and it's hard to know what any one song is really about. There's a moment of sympathy for the protagonist in the next-to-last song, because parsnips are scalding his lungs and thistles are burning his feet and his lover won't return, and honestly, who would wish that sort of physical and emotional pain on anyone? But the feeling quickly passes because, I mean, really—can a parsnip scald someone's lungs?

None of this changes the fact that Bird's music is pretty. Individual words and lines are hard to grasp, yes—but they're probably not meant to be grasped. This multi-instrumentalist and music scholar seems more interested in the sounds of words than the messages they convey (as evidenced best in "Tenuousness": "Tenuousness less seven comes to three / Them you us plus eleven / Comes just shy of infinity"). Only Bird knows what on earth that means—but we can all agree that it sure sounds nice. This isn't a confessional record, and Bird isn't trying to make it onto any wedding playlists or breakup mixes (but just for fun, if you're making one, let me recommend "Anonanimal" and "Oh No," respectively). Poetry has always been another tool in his box, but here more than ever, it seems that the lyrics serve as an instrument, not to be separated from the rest of the music, and helping to create a seamless but showy overall sound. 67

There's nothing wrong with having to refer to the dictionary every once in a while, but Bird's constant textbookish references make it almost impossible to connect with whatever sentiments lie beneath his gratuitous wordplay, and it's hard to know what any one song is really about.

➥ *PASTE* ASSOCIATE EDITOR KATE KIEFER CAN'T WHISTLE.

Photo by Erik Weiss

DON'T THINK, JUST DANCE

Animal Collective gets asses moving

BY BART BLASENGAME

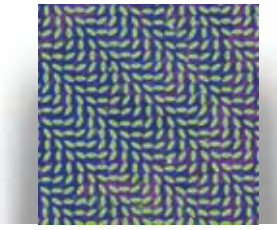
ANIMAL COLLECTIVE

Merriweather Post Pavilion DOMINO

In the last five years or so, the usually Frankenstein-limbed members of the indie-rock-listening community remembered that they have asses. More to the point, they remembered that, sometimes, it's fun to throw back your head, shut your eyes, and shake said backside like it was on fire.

Artists like Girl Talk and Dan Deacon have taken the obvious route toward woot-woot sensory overload, filling their songs with hooky samples and maniacally propulsive beats that basically act as marionette strings for an audience that can't help but move its arms and legs in appreciation.

Even in the more traditional realm of guitar/drum/bass rock, inciting the crowd to dance is seen more and more as a positive, even hip thing. But lest we be confused with the Pinks and Timberlakes of the world (we will always worry that we look ridiculous while dancing), we have to make the journey from our brain to our tail feather difficult. We need to be able to contemplate lyrics and time-signature changes and meaning; to gently stroke our artfully manicured mustaches before we can allow ourselves such base pleasures. But on *Merriweather Post Pavilion*, Animal Collective's message seems to be, "Fuck all that."



Nine albums and nine years in, it's time to stop trying to figure out what the hell Animal Collective—vocalist/guitarist Avey Tare, percussionist/vocalist Panda Bear and knob-twiddler Geologist—is, and just enjoy the orgasmic rush of danceable rock. After all, hands are meant not to be jettisoned up in frustration at dead-end lyrics, but thrown in the air as if you just didn't care.

From the gurgling heartbeat of "In The Flowers"—where a sampled, garbled voice seems to be saying "I'mna dance," and Tare drunkenly warbles about longing to leave his body for the night—this is an album made for the waist down. Tare's proclamation sets free the song's pulsating body, a dreamy, floating chorus of voices and gently picked strings that glides on top of a booming, lock-step bass thud.

And nothing goes better with sweaty dancefloor gyrations than sex and love and ladies, themes that carry two of *Merriweather*'s best tracks, "My Girls" and "Summertime Clothes." The former is a loose-limbed jumping jack of a feel-positive pop song that sounds somewhere between Eno and Byrne's *My Life in the Bush of Ghosts* and the Spice Girls' *Spiceworld*. It's a musical chigger that burrows deep and won't leave. "Summertime Clothes" is similarly addictive, a robo-tripping love song where—over a bouncing low end and weird harpsichord crescendos—Tare and Panda Bear's harmonies sound absolutely Shins-esque.

Not everything is hearts and ketamine, though. *Merriweather*'s middle gets a bit dirgey. The echo-chamber effect on "Daily Routine" borders on the boring; "Bluish" threatens to meander until Tare's killer chorus rips the Band-Aid off. And then there's Animal Collective's unquenchable penchant for experimentation. "Guys Eyes" recycles Panda's voice what seems like a billion times until he's singing over himself in 18-part harmony, finally validating all those once-puzzling Beach Boys comparisons. "Lion In A Coma" is built on a looped African jaw harp and an impossible-to-step-to 9/4 beat.

After all, hands are meant not to be jettisoned up in frustration at dead-end lyrics, but thrown in the air as if you just didn't care.

Interesting sign posts, for sure—the kind of thing Collective completists live for. But thankfully the band doesn't forget the sampled mantra that started this whole journey: *I'mna dance*. As proof, they close the album with "Brothersport." Shimmying its way to life in a clash of mechanized tribal drumming and Afrobeat-lite choral rounds that sound like Fela Kuti making love to his 27 robotic wives, the song soon dissolves into a racket of assembly-line noises before returning to rapid-fire three-part harmonies that finally culminate in an overblown explosion of big-beat rave. It's the kind of epic track that probably depletes your serotonin levels while you listen.

But this is the new indie ethos: Don't think; dance. Like Panda Bear says on "My Girls," "I don't mean to seem like I care about material things like my social stance, I just want four walls and adobe slats for my girls."

I have absolutely no idea what that means, and I don't care—print it up, put it on a T-shirt and hand me that glow stick.

91

Panda Bear loves coffee and Geologist loves cats.

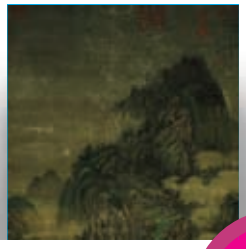
Photo by Takahiro Imamura

M. WARD

Hold Time

MERGE

Him goes back to solo for pleasant but uneven record



M. Ward loves KBOO and KCRW, Wallace Stevens, Little Pica Cosa, New Mexico and Inland Empire.

"Everybody's goin' out / Havin' fun / I'm a fool for stayin' home / Havin' none," Matt Ward sings on his cover of Don Gibson's "Oh Lonesome Me." But those words clearly don't apply to Ward's life. Over the past decade, as he's been cultivating a successful solo career as one of America's finest singer/songwriters, Ward has also found ample work in production (Jenny Lewis' *Rabbit Fur Coat*), guest spots (My Morning Jacket, Norah Jones, Bright Eyes) and a critically acclaimed side project (She & Him). So it makes sense that *Hold Time* comes almost three years after Ward's last solo effort, the excellent *Post-War*. It's the longest it's taken the Oregonian to follow-up an album.

On *Hold Time*, he once again finds himself in good company. Lucinda Williams sings on "Lonesome," and there are guest appearances from Zooey Deschanel (the She to Ward's Him) and members of DeVotchKa and Grandaddy. On certain tracks, Ward shines as brightly as ever. "Never Had Nobody Like You" is a sweet tune with crunchy guitars, "Jailbird" is quintessential Ward with string embellishment, "To Save Me" rollicks fiercely, and the cover of Buddy Holly's "Rave On" is splendid.

Still, something isn't quite right. Too many of *Hold Time's* tracks fail to leave an impression, blending into one another. The title track meanders as if a spacey castoff from The Flaming Lips' *Soft Bulletin* sessions. Other songs–such as "Blake's View" and "Fisher of Men"–alternate between blandness and artistic territory Ward has previously and thoroughly mined. Not that he has to innovate on every song, but *Hold Time* contains more than a few uninspired moments.

Still. even when Ward verges on boring, his playing is accomplished. An underrated guitarist who brightens songs with his six-string like so many runway lights, even his lesser moments are almost always pleasant. Ward hasn't written an offensively bad song to date, which makes *Hold Time* easier to accept, but it's starting to show that the dude's got a lot on his plate. 67

AUSTIN L. RAY

Photo by Autumn De Wilde

FRANZ FERDINAND

Tonight: Franz Ferdinand

SONY/EPIC

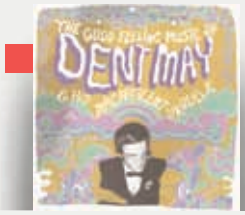
The pitiful decline of a once-great band

Terrible bands make terrible records all the time, which is fine. No point wasting energy on whatever Nickelback's up to these days—those dudes can't help themselves, and are free to suck as much as they'd like. But it's been a long time since a band as good as Franz Ferdinand made a record as appalling as *Tonight: Franz Ferdinand*. Truly, the four dapper Scotsmen that constitute this group should be ashamed of their tuneless, thoughtless, meaningless new offering, which distorts the proud legacy of a band that once mattered.

What makes the album so bad? Is it the leering vocals? The uninspired melodies? The horrific production, which cranks the sound until it's literally painful to the ears? Yes, but that's not all. One mustn't forget the lyrics, which seem to lack both heart and brain. And how about the eight-minute "Lucid Dreams?" Before this album, it was inconceivable that a band this tight would release such a protracted wank. Now, anything's possible.

The album seems even worse compared with Franz's self-titled 2004 debut, an instant classic that kicked rock 'n' roll back onto the dance fl oor, where it belongs. The sophomore album that followed in 2005 was rougher, but it left hope that more good work was forthcoming. Maybe one day.

Franz took more than three years to make *Franz*—a laughably long time for such meager results. The layoff suggests that Franz is either too confused or too lazy to move forward. They're still not a bad band. They're just a pitiful caricature of the sly, swaggering gang they once were. We know they're capable of more. We know we could have it so much better. **NICK MARINO** 13



DENT MAY & HIS MAGNIFICENT UKULELE

The Good Feeling Music of Dent May & His Magnificent Ukulele

PAW TRACKS

Uke-wielding descendant of Jonathan Richman delivers

"Welcome to my record," Dent May croons in a deep, syrupy drawl at the beginning his Magnificent Ukulele's debut full-length (the prolific Mississippian has already had several genre-spanning projects). Much like the moniker and basic modus operandi (he plays ukulele on all but one track here, augmented by a band), the introduction at first feels a little gimmicky. But further inspection reveals a charming ("Oh, Paris!") and often hilarious ("God Loves You, Michael Chang") songwriter who waxes delightful throughout these dozen tracks. What *The Good Feeling* lacks in variation it makes up for with clever turns of phrase and simple, contagious melodies—those, and one exaggerated wink in the direction of fellow purveyors of wit and whimsy, Jens Lekman and Jonathan Richman. No wonder Animal Collective signed this dude to Paw Tracks after seeing him live once. May and his Magnificent Ukulele quickly make for endearing company. 76

AUSTIN L. RAY

A.C. NEWMAN

Get Guilty

MATADOR

Mates of State and Superchunk's Jon Wurster jam with Newman on sophomore solo album

A.C. Newman is the primary songwriter for the New Pornographers, but he gets less attention than some of his bandmates. He isn't countrified like Neko Case or ostentatiously theatrical like Dan Bejar (Destroyer). Instead, he deflects attention from his persona to his songwriting bona fides, availing himself of the layered production and inventive twists of '60s/'70s stalwarts like Harry Nilsson. Newman's second solo outing, *Get Guilty,* is a baroque-pop gem, on which he displays remarkable tonal control via crafty arrangement. Check out how the fanfare of "There Are Maybe Ten Or Twelve" seamlessly tapers off into an acoustic jangle and syncopated maracas, shifting the mood of Newman's unflashy but indelible vocal melody. Or "Thunderbolts," where an eerie synth seems to pull backward against an inexorable tide of crunchy guitar. In making this nostalgic mode of songwriting sound fresh and vital, Newman is a kindred spirit to Philadelphia's BC Camplight, with whom he should definitely collaborate. C'mon, "AC/BC?" That's too good to pass up. **BRIAN HOWE** 82

Dent May & His Magnificent Ukulele photo by Denny Renshaw

ROUNDUP: TRIBUTE ALBUMS

BY STEPHEN M. DEUSNER AND JESSICA SUAREZ

Unloved, unlistened to, and often unloaded to the dollar bin, tribute albums are the bastard children of the music industry. Only rarely do they play as actual unified albums, but with their buffet approach and good intentions, they remain interesting for what they tell us about the artists on both sides of the covers.

UNDONE:

A MusicFest Tribute to Robert Earl Keen

RIGHT AVE/ DICKSON PRODUCTIONS

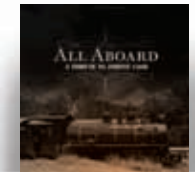
The Texas troubadour certainly deserves this two-disc tribute, if only to remind listeners of his witty, detail-rich songs about drifters and country singers. The live acoustic setting gives the set a cohesion most tributes lack, and generally, the participants showcase Keen's lesser-known songs, slowing them down but mostly retaining their grit and spit. However, Keen shows them all up during the encore with a jazzy reading of "Dreadful Selfish Crime" and a jammy "Road Goes On Forever." **S.D.**

ALL ABOARD:

A Tribute to Johnny Cash

ANCHORLESS

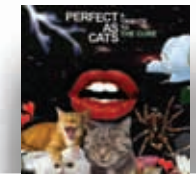
A perennial tribute-album subject, Johnny Cash nevertheless proves difficult to cover, his resonant and recognizable baritone marking every song he ever sang. Nobody tries to out-Cash the Man in Black on *All Aboard,* which opts for raspy and harsh instead of low and stoic. Chuck Ragan and Ben Nichols sound hoarsely hardened and urgent singing "Wreck of the Old '97" and "Delia's Gone," respectively, but The Dresden Dolls' hyper-dramatic "Ballad of a Teenage Queen" stands out most of all for irreverently resetting Cash's Americana tale in Weimar, Germany. **S.D.**



PERFECT AS CATS:

A Tribute to The Cure MANIMAL VINYL

If *Undone* and *All Aboard* are fairly faithful tributes, the artists on this two-disc charity comp (benefitting InvisibleChildren.com) take great liberties with Robert Smith's moody lyrics and The Cure's mopey blur of sound. A few tracks play to the band's post-punk history and end up sounding very revivalist a la 2003, but others give these dour songs a fresher spin. Mariee Sioux and Rio en Medio turn "Love Song" and "Pictures of You" into otherworldly folk and lounge arrangements, respectively, revealing how adaptable The Cure's music can be. **S.D.**



PHOSPHORESCENT:

To Willie DEAD OCEANS

Brooklyn-relocated Athens, Ga., artist Matthew Houck picked Nelson's saddest tracks for this tribute, which fits his own discography. Nelson's more riotous tunes would ring false for Phosphorescent, but most of these move with a reserved grace. Houck's band adds authentic country textures to the tracks, and Ricky Ray Jackson's pliable steel guitar transforms songs like "Walkin'" into folk hymns and waltzes, more concerned with plainspoken charm than boasting and boozing. Houck's voice knows exactly when to crack, and when the material's as great as this, that's the only embellishment you need. **J.S.**

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ANTONY AND THE JOHNSONS

The Crying Light

SECRETLY CANADIAN

Antony gets back to nature

Antony and the Johnsons' new full-length, *The Crying Light*, reaches out from the band's investment in gender issues to grapple with nature of a different sort: the earth, familial relationships and a life-force passed on. The scope of the record spans generations, but retains a sense of communion with its listener. The intimacy of the Johnsons' sound is intensified by golden-boy avant-classical composer Nico Muhly's arrangements. Each song feels like one in a string of tellurian secrets. The connection stretches from the mother's womb in "Her Eyes are Underneath the Ground" to the catharsis of "Aeon" (a Latin word with connotations ranging from "world" to "lifespan" and "eternity"). When vocalist Antony Hegarty, whose voice has been sailing smoothly through the peaks of his trademark falsetto, cracks (shouting more than crooning the words "hold that man I love so much"), it's clear that the line refers as much to the speaker himself as to his father, his child, lover—his marriage to this woefully damaged but salvageable world. 88

MARY KATE VARNAU

THE BIRD AND THE BEE

Ray Guns Are Not Just the Future

BLUE NOTE

Los Angeles duo digs into pop pastiche

Having turned their off-the-cuff side project into a surprisingly eclectic debut album and a single that topped *Billboard*'s Hot Dance Club Play chart, singer/songwriter Inara George and veteran producer/sideman Greg Kurstin cast their stylistic nets even wider on their second full-length. As before, George is the coyly wide-eyed focus for Kurstin's glistening electronic production and bubbling beats, creating a singular personality out of a disparate set of song styles. But unlike before, the Brazilian and psych-pop influences are muted in favor of more straightforward gestures, with bits of icy space pop ("Ray Gun"), swinging Tin Pan Alley ("You're a Cad") and pristine, sighing balladry ("Baby") turning up among hip-hop-style shout-outs and smirking paeans to David Lee Roth. But while the duo borrows a bit too obviously from its influences at times, the album's detailed production and stylistic shifts reward multiple listens, resulting in a pop album with surprising depth. 68

MATT FINK

DEATH ON TWO WHEELS

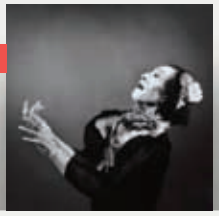
Separation of Church & Fate

THE GHOST UMBRELLA

More birth than death on this flashy debut

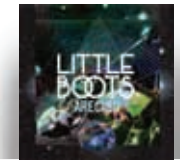
Death On Two Wheels makes rock 'n' roll dangerous again, with slurry-blurry lyrics, half-cocked dreamspeak of portents and regret, and a formidable guitar attack that recalls the nasty duels Allen Collins waged with Gary Rossington before Skynyrd's final plane ride. Following the same bumpy trail as Kings of Leon, this Atlanta foursome seems to be in pursuit of darker mysteries on the band's self-released debut. And unlike the Kings, they have more range and a greater reverence for '70s classic rock, not to mention the eccentric bite of vocalist Trae Vedder. Could he really have been christened with such a propitious rock name? No matter, he has the same grit and red clay in his voice that Chris Robinson had before he got famous and complacent—but there's something even more disturbing in Vedder's delivery that almost veers into goth. Especially on a song like "Bobby Havis," which shudders with psychedelic anxiety. It's a song so haunting it could've been penned in Rose Hill Cemetery next to Duane Allman's headstone. 82

JAAN UHELSZKI



THE REPORT

BY HENRY FREEDLAND



LITTLE BOOTS. *Arecibo* IAMSOUND

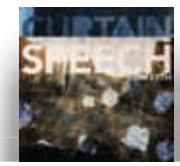
The skittering electro-pop on Victoria Hesketh's U.S. debut hits epic proportions with some help from Greg Kurstin (The Bird and the Bee) and fellow Brit Joe Goddard (Hot Chip). Club remixes from producers Fake Blood and Ebola add only marginal amounts, and the focus—thankfully—remains Hesketh's enchanting, homemade scuff on Kylie Minogue-style polish.

THE DEEP VIBRATION *Veracruz* DUALTONE

Let no one claim that these Nashville roots-rockers lack energy or elasticity. Lead man Matt Campbell caterwauls like his bolo tie is on fire half the time, then chokes up and trembles through the sort of balladry truest when written in Music City. Board work from former Neil Young attendants and vocal treatment from Gillian Welch lily-gild a lineage well-paid-forward on this debut.

CAT POWER *Dark End of the Street* MATADOR

In these *Jukebox*-session holdovers, Chan Marshall continues to haunt cover songs as a wearied, sultry ghost. Her smoke-and-spirit croon and understated backing band do hushed justice to source material that includes Otis Redding's "I've Been Loving You Too Long (To Stop Now)," Creedence Clearwater Revivial's "Fortunate Son" and The Pogues' "Ye Auld Triangle."



DM STITH *Curtain Speech* ASTHMATIC KITTY

As these folk suites evolve through ethereal chorales, barely heard intimacies and exploding orchestral crescendos, it becomes ever clearer that David Stith's compositional flair matches high points in the work of string-loving labelmate Shara Worden (of My Brightest Diamond) and gothic-folk maestro Matthew Houck (of Phosphorescent).

MATT AND KIM

Grand

FADER LABEL

Brooklyn two-piece ready for the floor, but not much else

Despite lyrics that ache to suggest otherwise, Brooklyn-based noisemakers Matt Johnson and Kim Schifino haven't done much growing up since their buzzworthy 2006 debut. The trademark drums, synths and handclaps, coupled with youthful exuberance and angst, resurface here. Luckily, the duo hasn't forgotten why people flocked to them in the first place: for impeccably crafted indie dance tunes buoyed by disarmingly catchy, bustling beats. *Grand*'s euphonious opening tracks don't disappoint, particularly the jubilant single "Daylight," which is so good it warrants a closing remixed version. But Matt and Kim have supplemented their charming recklessness and spontaneity with heavier production values, often disrupting any feeling of cohesiveness. The album's latter half oscillates between forgettable ("Turn This Boat Around") and exasperating ("Don't Slow Down"). Even so, the fleeting euphoria generated from the outset makes the talented twosome difficult to ignore. "The checkered flag means we've just begun," Johnson proclaims on "Cutdown." Let's hope so. **JEREMY MEDINA**

70

HEARTLESS BASTARDS

The Mountain

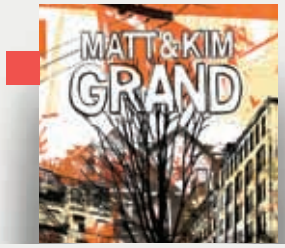
FAT POSSUM

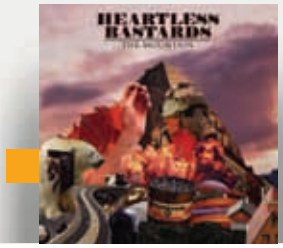
Ohio trio scales the heights

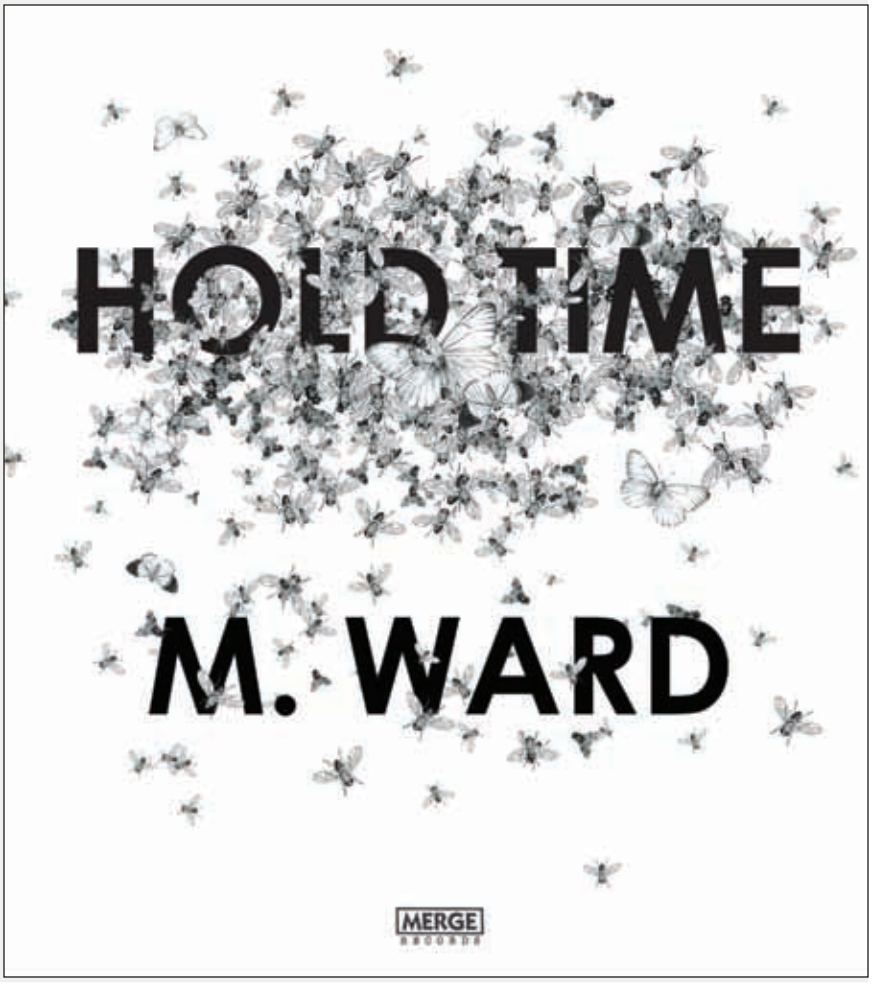
Erika Wennerstrom's enormous voice typically dominates discussion of this Ohio trio, and for good reason. Hers is a mighty blues holler, projecting self-conflict not just to the rafters, but to the rafters in other states. As distinctive as Wennerstrom sounds, however, her confident guitar work and the tight rhythm section of Mike Lamping and Kevin Vaughn do just as much to color these songs. On their third album, the Bastards stray further and further from the monolithic blues-rock of their 2005 debut while sharpening the soft focus of 2006's *All This Time*. The guitar-heavy title track certainly lives up to its name, sloping steeply to a psychedelic peak. "Nothing Seems the Same" and closing track "Sway" jam more sparsely, but *The Mountain* sounds best when the Bastards explore unlikelier textures, like the sinister acoustic jangle of "Be So Happy" or the banjo-spiked ramble of "Had To Go." This album isn't merely a single peak, but a whole mountain range. **STEPHEN M. DEUSNER**

88

↑ Matt & Kim photo by Tod Seelie







THE POWER OF GOODBYE

Just how much heartache can two people mend with a song? BY JASON KILLINGSWORTH

BUDDY & JULIE MILLER

Written In Chalk NEW WEST

Teenage boys don't typically learn how to play the guitar in order to make some grand artistic statement. Most are just looking to stir up two things—a glorious racket and, if the fates are feeling particularly generous, a bit of attention from the fairer gender. When Buddy Miller sat on the edge of his bed as a kid—long before the unruly mane fanning out from beneath his trademark ball cap turned grey—and tentatively strummed along with his favorite rock LPs, I doubt he had any idea just how well he'd manage, in both respects.

Buddy Miller loves Hoagy Carmichael. Julie Miller loves horny toads.

Buddy Miller photo by Michael Wilson.

Beginning with 1995's *Your Love And Other Lies*, Miller unleashed a string of gritty, soulful records that earned him a reputation as one of the finest—many would argue *the* finest—living practitioners of country music. And then, of course, there's his coterie of beautiful, silver-throated songbirds: Emmylou Harris, Gillian Welch, Alison Krauss, Shawn Colvin, Patty Griffin. And, of course, his wife Julie, whom he fell for in the mid '70s while the two were in Austin band Rick Stein & the Alleycats. The couple married in 1981, cementing a remarkable musical partnership.

Even though Buddy and Julie's first official duo record didn't arrive until 2001, the pair had collaborated extensively for years, writing together and performing on each other's records. That first joint release, titled simply *Buddy & Julie Miller*, was named Album of the Year at the Americana Music Association's first annual awards show and widely lauded by the music press.

The girlish, endearingly porcelain tenor of Julie's voice sparkles when backed by the robust, velvety twang of Buddy's counterpoint. But the magic you feel as a listener comes from more than just the sonic jigsaw of Buddy's and Julie's vocals. There's a soul-clasped gut intuition to the way their voices dance about one another that just breaks your heart.

It's fitting that the Millers' second duo record, *Written In Chalk*, contains a song written by Julie commemorating the late June Carter Cash. Buddy and Julie recorded "June" in their home studio the evening of May 15, 2003, the night June Carter Cash passed away. It's a stripped-down, ruminative farewell, sung from the perspective of the husband left behind, still dressed head-to-toe in black, ill-equipped to mourn the crushing loss. Julie's voice sounds scratchy and raw, like she's been crying, and Buddy's harmonies take on a devastating emotional weight in light of their fellow Nashville lovers, who will no longer share a tune this side of heaven.

Even though the record's opener "Ellis County" kicks off with a belly laugh, Buddy's goofing count-off and the uplifting scrape of Larry Campbell's fiddle part, *Chalk*'s theme of heart-crippling loss is firmly established at the outset. "Take me back when times were hard but we didn't know it / If we ate it, we had to grow it / Take me back when all we could afford was laughter and two mules instead of a tractor / Take me back again," Buddy sings with relish before Julie leaps in with the harmony. This recurring mantra of "take me back" begins almost every phrase in the song, but no matter how many fond memories are recounted, it doesn't take a Ph.D in physics to realize that those times are over and done with. There's no going back.

"Gasoline And Matches"—the lone Buddy/Julie co-write on the record—is the unofficial sequel to "You Make My Heart Beat Too Fast," from the pair's self-titled 2001 release. Bryan Owings' swampy, pounding drum cadence offers a suitably primal pulse to a song about the giddy combustibility of sexual attraction. Buddy's woozy, off-balance guitar solo reinforces the song's love-stoned swagger. But the tune's smirk dissolves all too quickly into piano-tinkling weeper "Don't Say Goodbye." (Incidentally, there's another cut on the album called "Everytime We Say Goodbye." And don't forget the devastatingly gorgeous title track, "Chalk," a duet between Buddy and Patty Griffin featuring the lyric, "You never even knew it when I said 'goodbye.'")

But the magic you feel as a listener comes from more than just the sonic jigsaw of Buddy's and Julie's vocals. There's a soul-clasped gut intuition to the way their voices dance about one another that just breaks your heart.

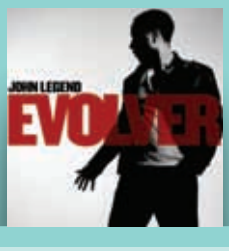
It feels uncouth to point out the relentlessly heartbroken narrative at the center of Julie's songwriting—after all, she's admitted to dealing with clinical depression her whole life—but there's a stultifying gravity to the emotional landscape of this record that occasionally leaves you numb. Still, at the edges of the record's most grey-cloud moments is the iridescent glimmer of vocal harmony, which may not be too far from human harmony. 84

DISCHORD

JOHN LEGEND

Evolver

G.O.O.D. MUSIC/COLUMBIA



FUTURE LEGEND

I want to be Gabrielle, the girl whose sad eyes captivate John Legend, inspiring him to request a dance and then offer an escape from life's depressing difficulties. And I'm seduced by "Take Me Away," just one of several strong, sexy and sometimes surprising tracks on *Evolver*. Known for his skills on the keys and a voice that retains a lovely purity, even in falsetto territory, Legend does indeed evolve with this record. He gives us a club hit, "Green Light," which features OutKast's André 3000 and is almost as good as "Used to Love U," from Legend's debut *Get Lifted*. There's a mid-tempo duet with Brandy that implores her to love him "Quickly" because "The globe is warming / My country's warring." And there's the dub reggae tune "No Other Love" with Estelle. And then Legend takes his craft a step further. "This Time" starts out as a typical Legend ballad, piano-driven and earnest, then swells with strings and a lightly staccato guitar. "If You're Out There" is an emotional plea for activism, heroism and peace that could've easily been Barack Obama's campaign song. The arrangement—with soaring vocals and gospel-choir backing—is reminiscent of Seal's best work. Now please excuse me while I swoon. **CHRISTINE VAN DUSEN**

LEGENDARY FLOP

On his third full-length, the charisma that launched Legend's career fails to grease the gears of a scattered and lethargic song cycle, one where he shuffles through various shades of adult contemporary and is repeatedly upstaged by high-profile guest appearances. Take first single "Green Light," a clumsy mélange of vintage synthesizers, popping beats and half-hearted seductions that wastes a perfectly absurd cameo by André 3000 and manages to make casual sex sound about as salacious as sitting in traffic. Or listen to him sleepwalk through "It's Over," dragging down Pharrell's funky production touches and Kanye West's spirited verses. There are sad-sack breakup ballads ("This Time"), *What's Going On*-aping misfires ("Take Me Away") and bland soft-rock crooners ("Cross the Line"), and Legend doesn't seem particularly invested in any of them. Unlike the great soul singers, his vocal performances suggest that he's role-playing more than feeling it. Worst of all is the cloying "If You're Out There," a "We Are the World"-style anthem that manages to squeeze the worst of the anti-war, anti-hate, up-with-people clichés into one sweeping four-minute power-ballad disaster. Unlike the rest of the album's easily forgotten flubs, this one's likely to plague us during feel-good flicks and campaign rallies for decades to come. **MATT FINK**

MODERN SKIRTS

All Of Us In Our Night

SELF-RELEASED

Athens, Ga., popsters offer mid-tempo pleasantries

Amidst Ben Folds-inflected piano rockers, Modern Skirt's 2005 debut featured the charming "Pasadena," a shuffling acoustic number that backed heartsick hopes with chiming group vocals. The lion's share of their follow-up seizes on that formula, at its best holding steady between '60s sunshine and '90s alternative, and spinning out breezy jangle pop. The mid-tempo pleasantries do sometimes plod, even with their layered depth, and a melting-pot agreeability here is often an interest-losing weakness. *All Of Us* is invigorated midway through by "Face Down," which sounds like a bizarro Weezer—in a world where Rivers Cuomo's childhood obsession was more along the lines of Zombies than White Zombie. And as exhibited by the sly build of "Motorcade," a campfire sing-along for the urban set (produced by R.E.M.'s Mike Mills), the Skirts are most captivating when they allow their songs to mature and surprise. **HENRY FREEDLAND**

74

RUTHIE FOSTER

The Truth According to Ruthie Foster

BLUE CORN MUSIC

Soul singer mixes it up a bit too much on sixth disc

Almost exactly two years after the well-received *The Phenomenal Ruthie Foster*, the soulster is back, if somewhat less prodigious. There's no denying the power of Foster's monstrous voice, and while it's tempting to say her smooth vibrato can do no wrong, the genre-bending singer bends a bit too much here. This disc too often veers away from her musical palette of folk, Americana, soul and blues, creating an overcooked confection of tunes. See the reggae-tinged "I Really Love You" or the Foster-penned "Dues Paid in Full" for examples of jaunty experiments gone awry. With a voice this strong, Foster's music is most enjoyable on embattled scorchers with hard-nosed lyrics like title track "Truth!", which features a rollicking guitar intro by Robben Ford (Bob Dylan, Joni Mitchell) and a straight-for-the-gut message. Its unassuming intensity is Foster at her bravest. **LOREN LANKFORD**

60

COLLEGE ROCK 101

Even with so many classic albums, R.E.M. was never better than on its debut

BY JOSH JACKSON

R.E.M.
Murmur (Deluxe Edition)
UNIVERSAL

Athens in 1983 was not the middle of nowhere. The B-52's had introduced the music world to Georgia's fifth largest city four years earlier, just before Bulldogs running back Herschel Walker introduced it to everyone else in 1980, leading UGA's football team to its first undisputed national championship. But while Athens wasn't a one-horse town, neither was it Greenwich Village or San Francisco or even Detroit; Athens was as unlikely a birthplace for a nationally renowned music scene as Muscle Shoals, Ala., before it.

But there's something about a college town nestled in some small corner of rural America that ignites creativity in kids who grow up in towns like Macon, Ga., or Collinsville, Ill., and discover that there actually are others out there who share their passion for music, film or art. Beginning in the late '70s and early '80s, as the landscape of America was beginning to look the same everywhere, relatively remote academic locales served as quirky bastions of individuality. Other college towns like Chapel Hill, N.C.; Madison, Wisc., and Austin, Texas, would eventually get their moment. But in 1983, the spotlight was on Athens, thanks to R.E.M.'s full-length debut, *Murmur*.

All four of the band's members spent part of their lives far from Georgia, but *Murmur* became indelibly tied to its city of origin because it sounded unlike anything from anywhere else. Peter Buck didn't invent the jangly Rickenbacker tones he employed so wonderfully on the album, but it had been a long while since The Byrds had taken flight. And the way Buck's guitar and Mike Mills' bass busily bounced around otherwise simple choruses created something entirely new. Michael Stipe put his stamp on this already singular sound, crooning mumbled, enigmatic phrases like, "They called the clip a two-headed cow / Your hate clipped and distant, your luck, pilgrimage," and it sounded like the most important sentiment uttered on record since Dylan's *Blonde on Blonde*.

Even the album's now-iconic cover art, a railroad trestle covered in leafy green kudzu, seemed exotically Southern, though it looked to locals like every other railroad trestle or abandoned shack or shrubbed hillside drowning in the imported Japanese weed. There was nothing mystical about the four musicians who meshed together on *Murmur*, but their sound emerged so fully formed that even after 26 years and 15 proper albums, it's still arguably their best. And those albums that might contest the honor—*Reckoning* and *Lifes Rich Pageant*—rely so heavily on the *Murmur* template as to make the argument moot.

> *Murmur* became indelibly tied to its city of origin because it sounded unlike anything from anywhere else.

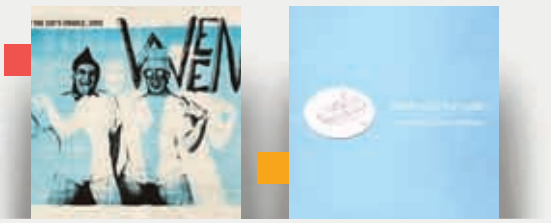
The album's "Deluxe Edition" includes a 16-song bonus disc from a concert in Toronto three months after the album was released. It was the band's third show in Canada, but they'd been touring relentlessly, playing more than 300 gigs during the three previous years. The songs sound surprisingly like the record (save for some painfully off-key singing on "Harborcoat"), emphasizing the lack of studio trickery in Mitch Easter and Don Dixon's production. The formula was so simple it could've been recorded with five tracks: Buck's shiny, happy guitar melodies buoyed by Mills' equally playful bass licks; Stipe's moody voice that begged you to mumble along (even when you couldn't decipher the words) merging dreamily with Mills' understated harmonies; and Bill Berry's solid, shuffling backbeat. Despite the hundreds of bands (including dozens back in Athens) that tried, no one could ever perfect the blend so well. And though R.E.M. has sloughed off their three-album slump to return to mid-career form on *Accelerate*, the uncomplicated magic of *Murmur* remains elusive, even to the band that created it.

99

Michael Stipe loves Tina Barney, Asian Punk Boy, Santogold, Spain's Kink magazine and Maison Martin Margiela.

R.E.M. (L-R): Michael Stipe, Mike Mills, Bill Berry, Peter Buck. Photo by Laura Levine

PASTE'S EDITOR-IN-CHIEF JOSH JACKSON LIVED IN ATHENS A DECADE TOO LATE.



WEEN

At The Cat's Cradle, 1992

CHOCODOG

Portrait of the Boognish as a young spaz

"We must've been really good last time we were here," Dean Ween cracks as he and brother Gener take the stage. "Half as many people here." Perhaps audiences just didn't know what to make of Aaron Freeman, Mickey Melchiondo Jr., their funny voices, stage names, and drum-playing DAT machine. Over 75 minutes, the duo pops between contemporaneous undergrounds: thrashing grunge ("Tick"), jam-bandy teases of Hendrix ("You Fucked Up"), lo-fi sludge ("Demon Sweat") and The Jerky Boys. Predominant, though, are Gene/Freeman's winning melodies: glam falsettos ("Captain Fantasy"), good-natured surrealism ("Marble Tulip Juicy Tree") and naked hurt ("Birthday Boy"). Deaner/Melchiondo shreds, too. Nearly a decade old by the time of this recording, this diverse foundation of influences and styles helped Ween become one of the most consistently underrated cult acts of the '90s. No need for multiple camera angles on the 45-minute home-video bonus DVD (different tours, similar material)—it's just Ween at work, tweakishly over-gesticulating. Audiences got it soon enough. **JESSE JARNOW** 85

DEATH CAB FOR CUTIE

Something About Airplanes (Limited-Edition Deluxe 2-disc)

BARSUK

Indie-rock success story's remarkable—and remarkably noisy—first chapter

A decade has officially passed since Bellingham, Wash.'s Death Cab for Cutie released its first official full-band LP on Barsuk, and the timing feels right for a retrospective. Despite the impressive commercial strides the band has made in recent years, odds are that plenty of recent converts haven't yet discovered these early gems, especially the echoing guitar-and-bass groove of album standout "Your Bruise." Even in those early days, singer Ben Gibbard displayed a brilliant intuitive sense of cadence and melody that set him apart from the rest of the bespectacled indie-rock pack. There was an emotional drama boiling over the edge of each indelible hook and elongated vowel.

Calling this reissued edition of the band's obstinately lo-fi masterpiece *Something About Airplanes* "deluxe," however, might strike the faithful as somewhat tongue-in-cheek. After all, the album sounds like it was recorded to worn-out cassette on a thrift-store boombox inside a massive, gutted, tin-walled, concrete-floored warehouse (and all this time I thought it was just the pitiful-quality MP3s I downloaded off Napster circa 2000 when I first caught wind of these guys). But even the record's lo-fi edge can't fully distract from the incredible songwriting and melodic sense captured on *Airplanes*.

The album possesses the catalytic urgency of Death Cab's early live shows. In case you didn't happen to reside in the Emerald City in the late '90s, Barsuk has graciously bundled the reissue with a bonus CD containing a live soundboard recording of the band's first Seattle gig at legendary venue the Crocodile Cafe. While the music is tight and inspired, it's endearing to hear Gibbard tune his own Telecaster after songs and Chris Walla marvel aloud at how many people showed up to the gig. It's not difficult to hear the spark Death Cab had early on, and all too obvious why they caught fire just a few years later. 86

JASON KILLINGSWORTH

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A DEVASTATING LOAD

Winslet and DiCaprio deliver Oscar-bound performances in Mendes' send-up of 1950s suburbia

BY SEAN EDGAR

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

IN THEATERS NOW

DIRECTOR: Sam Mendes
WRITER: Justin Haythe (screenplay), Richard Yates (novel)
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Roger Deakins
STARRING: Leonardo DiCaprio, Kate Winslet, Michael Shannon, Kathy Bates
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Paramount Vantage, 119 mins.

Nearly a decade after director Sam Mendes crafted *American Beauty,* one of the finest depictions ever of decaying love and sociological discord, he returns to nearly identical themes in an adaptation of the Richard Yates novel *Revolutionary Road.* The film also marks an ironic reunion for Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet, whose passionate affair in 1997's *Titanic* made for the highest-grossing movie of all time. While James Cameron's romantic epic detailed the timeless appeal of star-crossed love, Mendes spoils the illusion by showing what happens after the honeymoon ends and resentment replaces infatuation.

Yates' novel tells the story of Frank (DiCaprio) and April Wheeler (Winslet), a couple of idealistic newlyweds who become trapped in the American Dream circa 1955—2.5 children, picket fence a desk job. Whereas the book poetically described the psychological fault lines of its central characters, Mendes constructs a skeletal plotline of Frank and April's struggle and defeat at the hands of conformity. Like Hemingway and Fitzgerald, Yates understands the inherent flaws of a dream that only has one method of attainment, and the film digs into the raw contempt in its source material.

The opening scene offers the only hint of happiness amidst the fall of the Wheeler clan, as Frank and April dance innocently at a party. The next scene shows the couple post-wedding, with Frank's hand cocked midair about to strike his wife, both raging about their respective claustrophobic roles as neutered office drone and housewife trapped by the daily grind. The Wheelers decide to flee their Connecticut suburb and move to Paris, where they reverse gender roles, with April earning for the family while Frank chain-smokes and rediscovers himself. Their escape soon suffers from increasingly dramatic obstacles as they realize that their affections might not be as eternal as their wedding vows suggested.

Mendes has proved an expert choreographer of the human animal pushed to its limit in adverse environments. He creates a bleak journey through familiar realities, punctuated by desperate characters searching for purpose. The film's skill at capturing corrosive romance is both its greatest strength and detriment—while frighteningly moving, it's also the best example of cinematic birth control since *Rosemary's Baby.* Be warned that there's little peace of mind in the perpetual entropy of the Wheelers' drowning relationship.

But it's hard not to cheer for these characters. DiCaprio and Winslet deserve mass praise for escorting the audience through their hell with amazing performances. Winslet is especially sympathetic as April; listening to her try to convince her husband of their individuality, pleading, "We are the most beautiful and wonderful thing in the world," is all the more heartbreaking when you recognize the illegible love hiding behind her rigid body language and fluttering voice. Winslet has said that the role was so emotionally devastating that it took her three months to recover.

The film's skill at capturing corrosive romance is both its greatest strength and detriment—while frighteningly moving, it's also the best example of cinematic birth control since *Rosemary's Baby.*

DiCaprio usually looks frazzled in his action movies, but it's truly unnerving to see his face masked in veins, broken down and displaying the one emotion he's lacked in almost all of his films: defeat. The film's final argument is almost unwatchable in its intensity, like seeing your parents at each other's throats on the brink of divorce. If this sounds like the antithesis of escapism, that's exactly what it is. It's a harsh, uncompromising look at the death of hope, and it does its job far too well. But to ignore its message because it's difficult to watch would be a mistake—this is pure art as parable, with Oscar-worthy performances to support it. **86**

➥ Leonardo DiCaprio and Kate Winslet. Photo by Francois Duhamel.

➥ SEAN EDGAR IS A NOMADIC WRITER AND PHOTOGRAPHER CURRENTLY BASED IN BROOKLYN, N.Y., WHERE HE WORKS FOR A GRAPHIC-DESIGN FIRM.

CHE: THE ARGENTINE & GUERRILLA

IN THEATERS NOW

DIRECTOR: Steven Soderbergh
WRITER: Peter Buchman
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Peter Andrews
STARRING: Benicio Del Toro
STUDIO/RUN TIME: IFC Films, 257 mins.

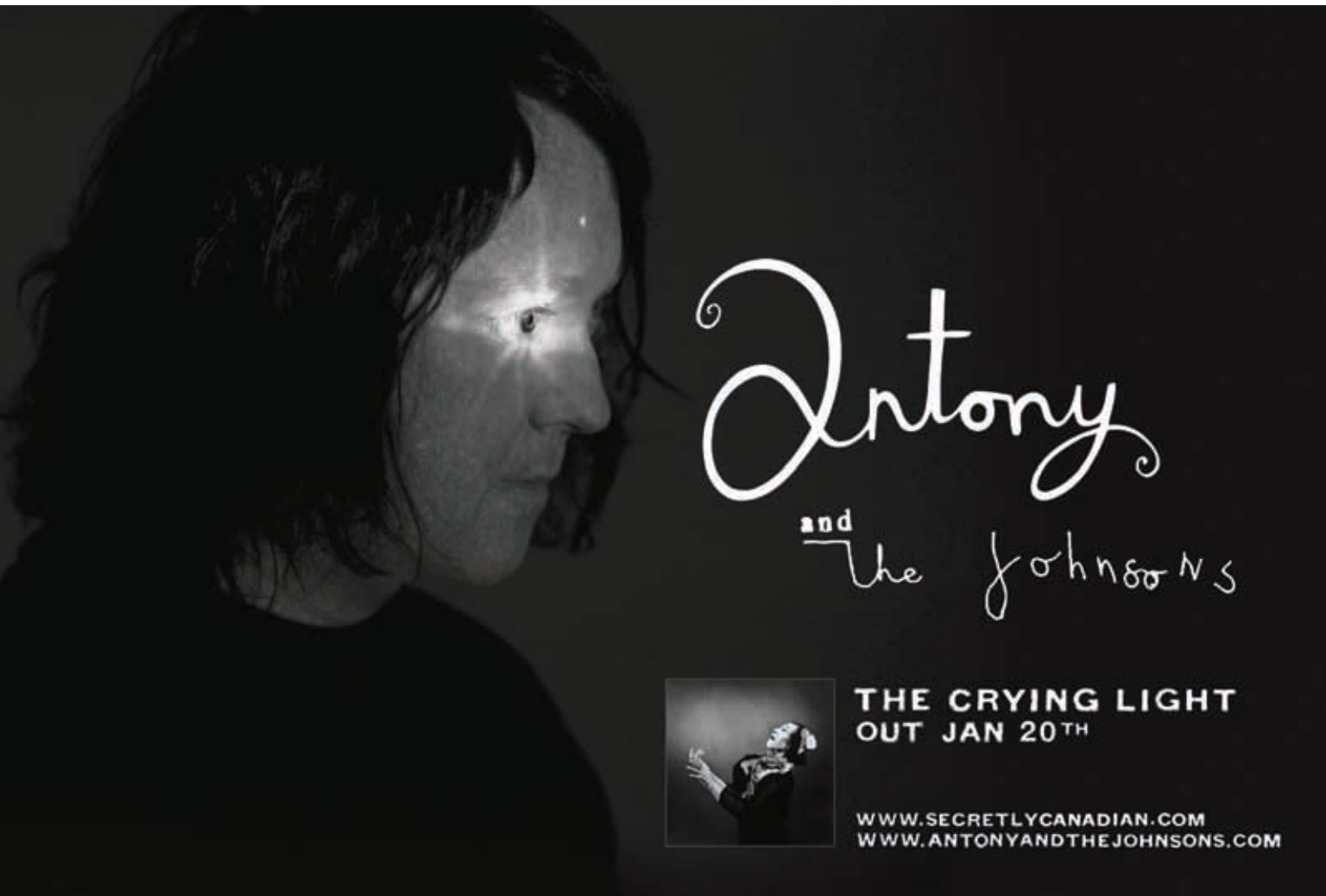
Soderbergh and Del Toro treat Che's life as a realist epic

It's simply audacious to make a four-hour plus film about the guerilla struggles of Argentine revolutionary Ernesto "Che" Guevara without ever really speaking of Guevara's life as a doctor, his eye-opening motorcycle trips across South America, his family, his relationship with Fidel Castro or his work in the Cuban government. And that's exactly what director Steven Soderbergh has done. But consider Guevara himself, who was far more than audacious. He was, after all, Che. Played by a fully engaged Benicio Del Toro, Guevara is full-on iconic from Soderbergh's first black-and-white pan across him.

Depicted on a 1964 trip to the United Nations, a sequence Soderbergh returns to as needed, *Che* sketches the Revolutionary ideology. What follows could be half the length, but could also be double. It has Oscar contender written all over it, yet is so even-toned that either no scenes are Oscar clips or all are. Guevara's marches—across Cuba in Part One, and through Bolivia's jungles in Part Two—are deeply tedious, far from the Cuban-dreamed utopia.

Del Toro is gruff, never questing to tease out Guevara's interior monologue. Rather, it's Guevara's unbendable will that centers the film and its two missions—one ascendant, one disastrous. It's revolution both endless and ephemeral, made of hills and fields and arbitrary bits of terrain suddenly invested with great meaning. The rivers and battles and slaughtered horses are an irreducible language beyond metaphor, beyond socialism, beyond realism and beyond intensity. There, in an infinite loop of revolution, Soderbergh is victorious: Che lives. **JESSE JARNOW** 89

Benicio Del Toro in *Che* Photo by K.C. Bailey.



SLIM CHANCE

Run-of-the-mill romantic comedy from top-shelf cast

BY KELLY MARAGES

LAST CHANCE HARVEY

IN THEATERS NOW

DIRECTOR/WRITER: Joel Hopkins
CINEMATOGRAPHER: John de Borman
STARRING: Dustin Hoffman, Emma Thompson, Eileen Atkins, James Brolin, Kathy Baker
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Overture Films, 99 mins.

With two Oscar-winning leads, *Last Chance Harvey* is the kind of movie you want to be great—with a capital G. It's not just the talent of the stars that spurs this expectation, but their uncanny ability to choose excellent roles, even as co-stars (their previous joint effort being the quietly poignant *Stranger Than Fiction*), which is why *Last Chance Harvey* is ultimately disappointing.

Unfair? Perhaps. But you could argue it's equally unfair of writer/director Joel Hopkins to line up the heavyweight showdown of Youth vs. Middle Age and tug at heart strings with a truly touching estranged father/daughter wedding scene, only to offer a conventional romantic comedy in the end. Despite its initial indications otherwise, that's exactly what *Last Chance Harvey* ends up being: a rom-com with old people. (At least it's not a rom-com *for* old people a la *Nights in Rodanthe*.)

As indicated by the title, Harvey (Dustin Hoffman) is a man at the end of his rope. He's wanted nothing more in life than to be a jazz pianist, but he's composing commercial jingles—apparently, not very well. Before he leaves New York for the wedding of his daughter Susan (Liane Balaban) in London, his boss makes it clear that he might as well not come back. But Harvey seems determined to get his titular last chance, opting to leave his daughter's wedding early to fly back, only to miss his flight and be fired while at Heathrow.

This is doubly devastating, as this job is all Harvey has. In one of the film's best scenes, Susan breaks the news to her father that she's asking her stepdad (James Brolin) to walk her down the aisle. Meanwhile, Kate (Emma Thompson), a middle-aged woman who has no one but her mother (who continually calls her cell), goes through the motions in London. Literally. She's constantly on the move—nary a scene goes by without her rushing. And whenever she's stationary—painfully, on an ill-fated blind date with a man whom she thought was in the (wink, wink) stationery business—she's out of her element.

> Hopkins lines up the potential heavyweight showdown of Youth vs. Middle Age, only to offer a conventional romantic comedy in the end.

Perhaps that's why, when Harvey and Kate meet and challenge each other to a "shitty day" contest only to learn how much they have in common, they walk through London for nearly the rest of the film. Here's where the trouble begins. Hoffman's Harvey, at first awkward and terribly sad, is now awkward and terribly creepy. One has trouble understanding why the much more fetching, socially gracious, 20-plus-years-his-junior Kate would want to be with him. For the first half of the movie, before they meet, Hopkins tries to pre-explain, cutting directly from parallel Harvey scene to parallel Kate scene (Harvey looking sad at a bar; Kate looking sad at a pub). The film grapples with the question but never pins it down, and the story wriggles away in a neat, happy-ending rubric.

Last Chance Harvey is not without surface pleasures and the actors remind us why they're at the top of their fields; it's not their fault if there's less within the story than they—and we—deserve. 58

➥ Dustin Hoffman and Liane Balaban. Photo by Laurie Sparham

➥ KELLY MARAGES IS A CULTURE WRITER LIVING IN NEW YORK CITY.

GOMORRAH

IN THEATERS NOW

DIRECTOR: Matteo Garrone
WRITERS: Roberto Saviano, Garrone, Maurizio Braucci, Ugo Chiti, Gianni Di Gregorio, Massimo Gaudioso
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Marco Onorato
STARRING: Toni Servillo, Gianfelice Imparato, Maria Nazionale, Salvatore Cantalupo
STUDIO/RUN TIME: IFC, 137 mins.

A bureaucracy of blood, Italian-indie style

Gomorrah's portrait of Italy's Camorra crime family is more a *Fast Food Nation*-style exposé of a teeming criminal ecosystem than a typical mob drama. Powered by several parallel plots corresponding to the family's interests (drugs, textile manufacturing, waste disposal, weapon running, etc.), the Camorras recall a massive, barely functioning bureaucracy whose internal conflicts happen to be frequently (and efficiently) resolved with insane carnage, both emotional and bodily. There's a mid-level manager (Gianfelice Imparato's Don Ciro, proud to work every day in a tie), an HR department (systematically testing adolescent recruits by decking them with bulletproof vests and shooting) and plenty of corporate politics. Based on Roberto Saviano's book, which landed Saviano under ongoing police protection, director Matteo Garrone sets the story's visual center in beautifully tiered housing projects. Too many plots keep characters from intense development, but *Gomorrah* finds a sharp existential center: specifically that there is none—just bloody, endless falling dominoes. **JESSE JARNOW**

Photo by Mario Spada.

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FORGET AFTER WATCHING

Are the Coens making fun of us? BY ROBERT DAVIS

BURN AFTER READING

AVAILABLE NOW

DIRECTOR/WRITERS: Joel and Ethan Coen
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Emmanuel Lubezki
STARRING: George Clooney, Frances McDormand, Brad Pitt, John Malkovich
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Focus Features, 96 mins.

The title of the latest Coen brothers film instructs us to "burn after reading," but that won't be necessary. The whole thing vanishes in a puff of sauna steam as soon as the end credits roll.

The ironically bombastic music that punctuates every scene may wink at the latest Hollywood spy thrillers—hello, Mr. Bourne—but the story feels more like the brothers' debut, *Blood Simple*, transplanted from its rural Texas setting to the suburbs of Washington, D.C. The Coens have replaced the drawling juke-joint employees with CIA agents and personal trainers, but the characters have concocted the same overly complicated schemes in order to squeeze money out of luckless saps. And of course they end up squeezing blood instead.

It goes like this: A pair of gym workers (Brad Pitt and Frances McDormand) stumble onto what they think is important information belonging to a spy (John Malkovich) whose wife (Tilda Swinton) is sleeping with a federal marshal (George Clooney), who is also sleeping with Frances McDormand. The script chases its tail for an hour and a half and then conks out, tired and strangely satisfied with the catch.

You can't blame the actors, even though their energetic performances don't harmonize very well. Malkovich and Swinton are as icy and angry as ever, but Pitt, McDormand and Clooney are acting like they're in a Monty Python sketch. Playing quirks instead of characters, Pitt bounces in his car like he just stepped out of an exercise video, McDormand mispronounces "drivel" as "dribble," and Clooney perpetually twitches, blinks and speaks in malapropisms. In the Coens' flat hierarchy of intelligence, Pitt's character sarcastically makes fun of everybody else, even as the Coens are making fun of him. In their comical roundelay, nearly every character calls someone else a moron, and nearly every character is spied on by another.

The Coens have an impressive ability to build their screenplays like timepieces. Each part fits precisely into another. But the problem is that this timepiece doesn't tell time—it just spins—and to get the cogs of this complicated mechanism to line up just right, the brothers rely on an accumulation of stupidity that feels like a cheat. If the film were a little funnier or had some sort of manic conclusion a la *Raising Arizona*, the Coens might be excused for putting one thumb apiece onto their scale.

I remember an old TV commercial for a synthetic, bacon-shaped dog snack in which someone's pet would leap excitedly at the sight of the box. "Dog's don't know it's not bacon!" said the ad's bemused voice. The Coens treat their characters the same way, but making adults circle around a worthless CD-ROM is easy if you allow your screenplay to fall back on the *deus ex machina* of dumbness.

The Coens have an impressive ability to build their screenplays like timepieces. Each part fits precisely into another. But the problem is that this timepiece doesn't tell time—it just spins.

The Coens' flawed but provocative Oscar winner *No Country for Old Men* was rich in ambiguities and patterns that invited moralistic readings and talk of good and evil, but much of it functioned the same way *Burn After Reading* does, and indeed the way many of their films do. The eternal question they ask about their obsessed characters is "Can you believe they did all this for nothing?" And a part of me thinks the Coens' predictable follow-up to a critical triumph like *No Country* was to scrape up a script from the bottom of the desk, produce it with A-list actors, and squeeze a little more money from all of us. Even as we sit and laugh at the buffoons on the screen, I'm not sure the Coens have exempted the audience from their ridicule. 48

➥Brad Pitt. Photo courtesy of Focus Features.

➥ROBERT DAVIS IS *PASTE*'S CHIEF FILM CRITIC.

THE DARK KNIGHT

AVAILABLE NOW

DIRECTOR: Christopher Nolan
WRITERS: Jonathan and Christopher Nolan
CINEMATOGRAPHER: Wally Pfister
STARRING: Christian Bale, Heath Ledger, Aaron Eckhart, Michael Caine
STUDIO/RUN TIME: Warner Bros., 152 mins.

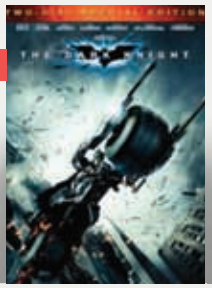
Good movies come out of Gotham

Of the recent attempts to reset a moribund Hollywood franchise, *Batman Begins* (2005) stands as an unqualified success. With *The Dark Knight*, writer/director Christopher Nolan not only raises the bar for superhero movies again, but also presses a summer full of comic-book films under the heel of an impressive bat boot.

In Gotham, the crime syndicate is floundering, but a new villain has arrived—a sadistic clown played by Heath Ledger in his penultimate performance. His pinched voice sounds like Tom Waits with a dash of Al Franken—not the growling or screeching Waits but the quiet, poetry-reciting one, the guy who wonders, "What's he *building* in there."

The exhilarating script, which Nolan wrote with his brother Jonathan, draws momentum from the idea that principles are at stake. In the final stretch they have a few too many plates in the air, but other comic-book films turn into CGI shoot-em-ups at this point, while the Nolans build their action climax around Bruce Wayne's interlocking complexes, testing them like clinical psychologists running a behavioral experiment the size of Chicago.

ROBERT DAVIS 93



THE TUDORS: THE COMPLETE SECOND SEASON

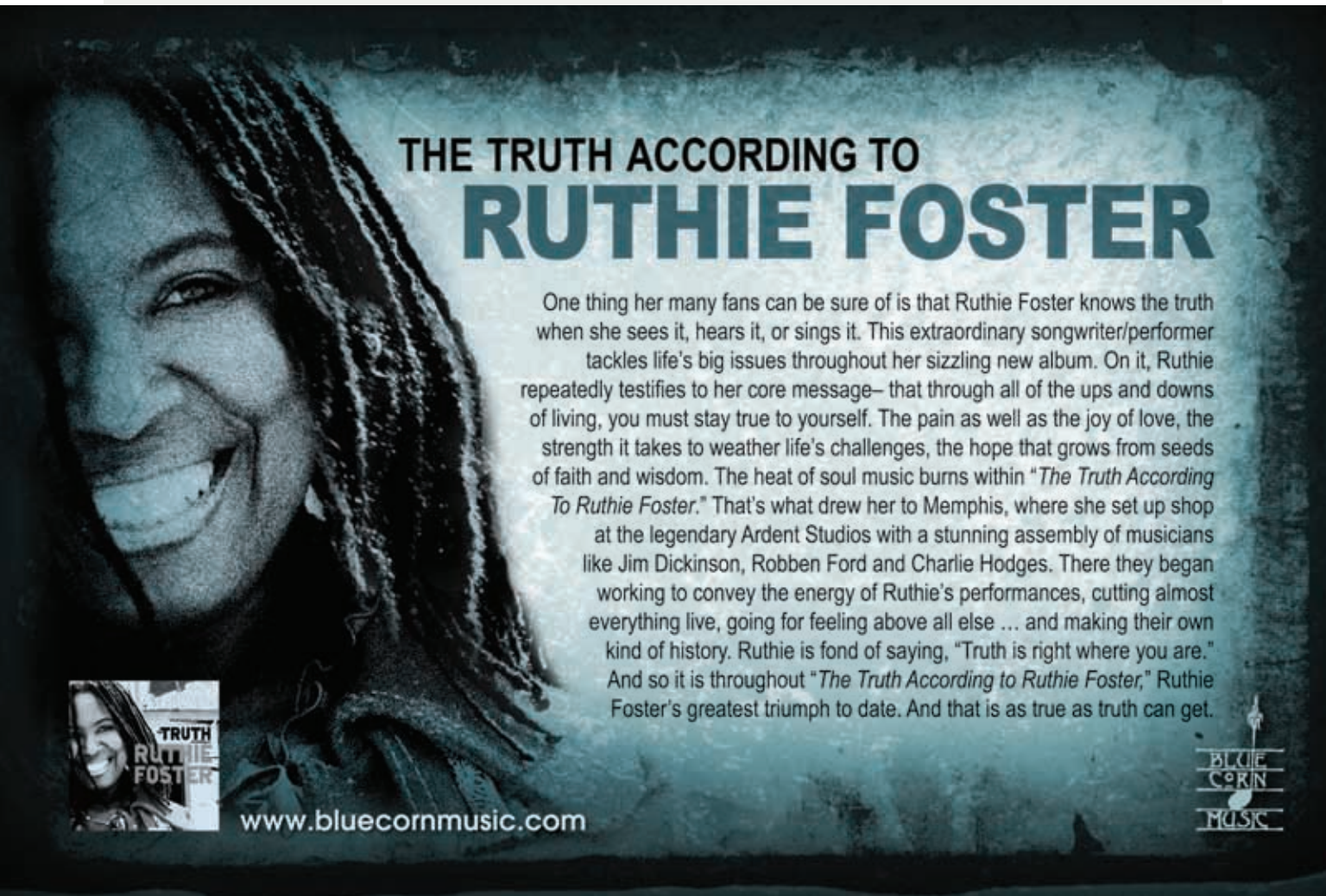
RELEASE DATE: JAN. 6

WRITER: Michael Hirst
PRODUCERS: James Flynn, John Weber
STARRING: Jonathan Rhys Meyers, Henry Cavill, Jeremy Northam, Natalie Dormer, Peter O'Toole
STUDIO/RUN TIME: CBS DVD, Showtime Entertainment and Paramount Home Entertainment, 542 min.

Wry historical series worth a weekend binge

Overrun with crude political intrigue and comically exuberant sex, the second season of *The Tudors* remains closely in step with the first, a gaudy window into the early reign of King Henry VIII. Jonathan Rhys Meyers returns as Henry, delivering his frantic, wild stares, a jarring reminder of how overcooked the series can be. But even with its loose, uneven pace and cavalier relationship with history, *The Tudors* at its best has real scale—a wry sense of the past and of the future. Creator Michael Hirst, who remains the show's sole writer, provides allusive moments with a young Princess Elizabeth, and the appearance of a droll Peter O'Toole as Pope Paul III reassures us that he hasn't lost his sense of humor. This four-disc set includes only nominal extras, but its real virtue is simply compiling the episodes, since the only way to consume a series like this is with a weekend binge.

JEFFREY BLOOMER 60


THE TRUTH ACCORDING TO
RUTHIE FOSTER
One thing her many fans can be sure of is that Ruthie Foster knows the truth when she sees it, hears it, or sings it. This extraordinary songwriter/performer tackles life's big issues throughout her sizzling new album. On it, Ruthie repeatedly testifies to her core message– that through all of the ups and downs of living, you must stay true to yourself. The pain as well as the joy of love, the strength it takes to weather life's challenges, the hope that grows from seeds of faith and wisdom. The heat of soul music burns within "The Truth According To Ruthie Foster." That's what drew her to Memphis, where she set up shop at the legendary Ardent Studios with a stunning assembly of musicians like Jim Dickinson, Robben Ford and Charlie Hodges. There they began working to convey the energy of Ruthie's performances, cutting almost everything live, going for feeling above all else ... and making their own kind of history. Ruthie is fond of saying, "Truth is right where you are." And so it is throughout "The Truth According to Ruthie Foster," Ruthie Foster's greatest triumph to date. And that is as true as truth can get.
TRUTH
RUTHIE FOSTER
www.bluecornmusic.com
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THE SLAVES OF EDEN

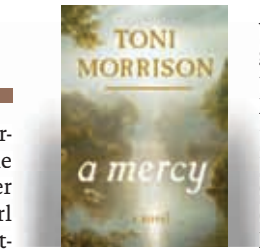
Nobel Prize-winning author explores colonial history

BY ASALI SOLOMON

TONI MORRISON

A Mercy

ALFRED A. KNOPF



It's difficult not to read Toni Morrison's latest novel outside the shadow of *Beloved*, that other novel about an enslaved girl whose mother makes a heartbreaking choice.

A Mercy is Morrison's fourth novel since *Beloved*, which ostensibly won the Ohio-born author the Nobel Prize and was declared "the single best work of American fiction published in the last 25 years" by *The New York Times*. It's no wonder *Beloved*'s towering reputation colors everything Morrison has written since.

Morrison hasn't become one of America's greatest writers by giving readers what they want; her business is giving them something they didn't know they needed. In this case, that something is a meditation on America before it dreamed of nationhood, told through the stories of early traders, farmers and slaves, of all races. The publicists at Knopf describe *A Mercy* as "almost like a prelude" to *Beloved*. It's important to note from the outset that *A Mercy*—set in the 17th century (versus *Beloved*'s late 1800s)—is totally different, and that this is good and right.

The center of *A Mercy* is the first-person narrative of Florens, a 16-year-old slave girl smarting from an early betrayal by her mother. Florens now stalks a callous, charming, free black ironworker in an effort to fill the gap in her heart. Her tale interweaves chapters that recount other characters' stories: Jacob Vaark, Florens' Anglo-Dutch owner; Lina, an enslaved Native American woman; a wild child of indeterminate origins called Sorrow; Jacob Vaark's hardy, but mournfully childless wife, Rebekka, and two indentured servants.

Morrison's iconic types and favored themes appear: murdered and abandoned children; proto-feminist whores; obsessive love; "good" slave owners who die, leaving their charges in a lurch; women fiercely clawing their way through the wilderness. With this cast of characters, Morrison helps us recognize the 1680s as if it were last week, and engages us in a work of fiction with surprisingly minimal plot.

A master of the historical novel who negates the cheesy reverberations of that phrase, Morrison serves a feast that 21st-century readers can taste. We get applesauce and pecans for dessert in Maryland and witness the "frisky, still living entrails" of a criminal put to death in London. Morrison goes beyond simply describing *how it was* to powerfully evoking *how it really might have been*. For example, *A Mercy* reminds us that many white folks traveled to the colonies in ship journeys nearly as dreadful as the Middle Passage, and that 17th-century London—with its religious passions and festive lynchings—was a hellhole that could make the frontier look like a picnic in the park.

The ad-hoc family at the center of *A Mercy* evokes an America with racial borders that have not yet hardened. The Vaarks' slaves and servants—all orphaned or sold Africans, whites and Indians—struggle to survive in companionship with the Master and Mistress. We know the history here; we know that it can't last. As Lina notes, Jacob and Rebekka think they are Adam and Eve. However, given the attendant genocide, disease and the eating of calf hearts fried in butter, Morrison questions not only whether early America was really Eden, but if Eden was really such a paradise.

A Mercy is its own reward. Still, it's not ovbious how to compare this decidedly smaller novel to that *single best work of American fiction published in the last 25 years.*

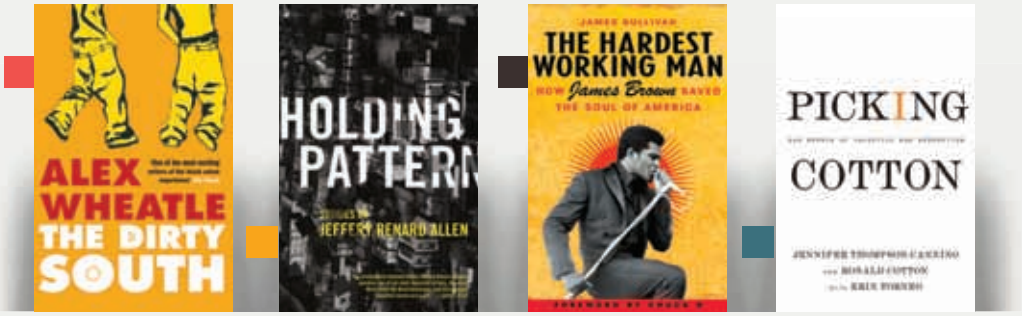
The reader who knows how grimly the story of race in America will proceed—allowing for a November surprise or two—may be lulled into predicting the end of *A Mercy*, particularly when the death of Jacob Vaark tears the "family" asunder. But the last chapter is a revelation of horrible tenderness that uprights our assumptions and knocks the wind out of the world. The end is the beginning. And the beginning was misunderstood by Florens and the reader.

A Mercy is its own reward. Still, it's not obvious how to compare this decidedly smaller novel to that *single best work of American fiction published in the last 25 years*.

Since Morrison's craft involves thwarting expectations, perhaps she would allow a left-field analogy. Let's consider the most prominent works of the most important television figure in the last 25 years: comic maestro Larry David. *A Mercy* is to cult favorite *Curb Your Enthusiasm* as *Beloved* is to mega-hit *Seinfeld*; narrower in scope and less anthemic, but just as lovely, more eccentric and every bit as necessary. 98

➥ Toni Morrison photo by Timothy Greenfield-Sanders

➥ ASALI SOLOMON IS THE AUTHOR OF *GET DOWN: STORIES*. SHE IS WORKING ON A NOVEL.



ALEX WHEATLE

The Dirty South

SERPENT'S TAIL

The other New South

While the term generally describes the Southern outposts of American hip-hop, "Dirty South" also seems to fit the South London streets of Dennis Huggins, the protagonist of Alex Wheatle's sixth novel.

Dennis is a *shotta*, or drug dealer, partnered with his best friend Noel, whose vibrant dialogue shows unyielding allegiance to his friend and the Brixton streets. Along the way, Dennis falls for Akeisha, but both love and friendship complicate life, as do race, class and religion.

Dennis has studied his family's Jamaican past, but love causes him to contemplate his South London future. Hindsight and history cannot tell him what waits around the next corner.

As Dennis sees posters of Marvin Gaye and Mary J. Blige on his girlfriend's wall, the author shows classic soul and new soul sharing space. It's a skillful turn by Wheatle, also a DJ, as he mixes young voices with familiar themes. **75**

RAVI HOWARD

JEFFREY RENARD ALLEN

Holding Pattern

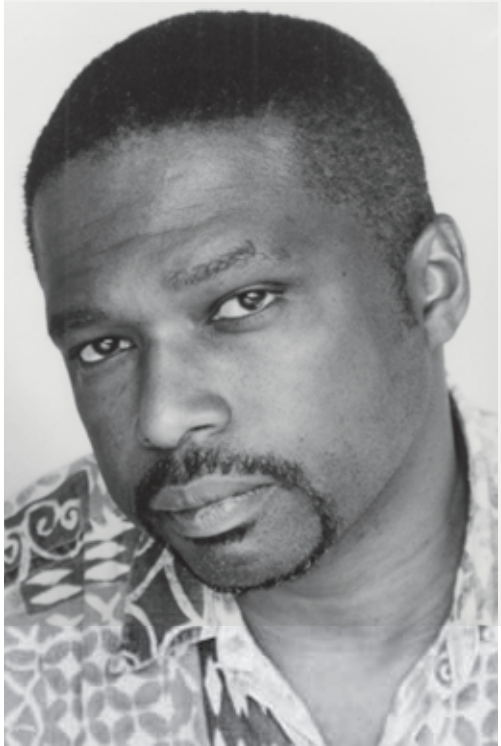
GRAYWOLF PRESS

A Chagall of Chicago stories

If you haven't yet heard of Allen, you will. Junot Diaz and Mary Gaitskill, two of our finest contemporary fiction writers, are unabashed fans, yelling of this prose surrealist, "prodigiously talented" (Diaz) and "stunning, tragic, wildly funny" (Gaitskill).

Though he now lives and teaches in New York City, Allen's urban voice remains more a product of his native Chicago, where the fantastic and miraculous would seem deeply at odds with the Windy City's grit and grift. But in Allen's stories, pennies literally fall from heaven ("It Shall Be Again"), and prisoners hover about the grey walls of their cells on tiny absurd wings ("Holding Pattern"), and a demon child bedevils a reckless businessman ("Shimmy").

Allen's first calling was verse, and his considerable poetic gifts of observance and language help keep aloft stories that might crash and burn in lesser hands. **CHARLES MCNAIR** **87**



Jeffrey Renard Allen photo by Miriam Berkley

JAMES SULLIVAN

The Hardest Working Man: How James Brown Saved the Soul of America

GOTHAM

It's a (hard-working) man's world

Back when celebrities were courageous enough to talk race into a microphone and the general public cared to hear, James Brown was King. The Godfather of Soul may have very well secured this particular crown on April 5, 1968—less than a day after civil-rights icon Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was slain on a Memphis hotel balcony. That night, on the Boston Garden stage, Brown charged into "Get It Together," and calmed the anxious crowd in attendance, the riot police and the local TV audience.

In this insightful telling of the career of James Brown, James Sullivan vividly explains how the performer rose to such influence. It's an especially important lesson two years after Brown's death. when it seems his legacy is quickly being reduced to bits of hip-hop songs, Eddie Murphy TV parodies and real-life family feuds. **80**

SONIA MURRAY

JENNIFER THOMPSON-CANNINO AND RONALD COTTON, WITH ERIN TORNEO

Picking Cotton

ST. MARTIN'S PRESS

False accusation and true redemption

The reader who trudges through the sluggish beginning of this book should keep in mind that it's a true story written by two real people, and not the fictitious fodder of a psych-thriller novelist. There's a payoff at the finish line, and along the way unfolds an unbelievable tale of injustice, faith, forgiveness and, ultimately, friendship.

Once acquainted with the authors, it is impossible to detach from this story. Thompson-Cannino makes no effort to pretty up her role as the woman who so confidently (and wrongly) picked co-author Cotton as her rapist, sending him off to more than a decade in prison. Cotton resists the temptation to which most victims of such injustice would fall prey: Self-aggrandizing renditions of his plight and vengeful blame.

Picking Cotton is a rare, pure story about power and powerlessness, and the fallibility of the human mind. Most of all, it's a story of the transcendent possibilities of the human spirit. **77**

CHARLES MCNAIR

James Sullivan photo by Monica Sullivan

KILL THE MESSENGER

Things get dangerous when the government decides you just might be a terrorist

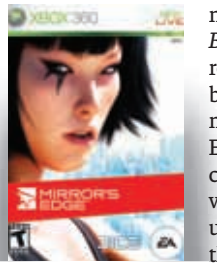
BY JASON KILLINGSWORTH

MIRROR'S EDGE

DEVELOPER: DIGITAL ILLUSIONS CREATIVE ENTERTAINMENT (DICE)
PUBLISHER: ELECTRONIC ARTS
PLATFORMS: XBOX 360, PS3, PC

At the 2008 Game Developers Conference in San Francisco, designer Ken Levine stood in front of a packed convention hall and delivered a presentation on the art of storytelling in video games. He'd earned the right. His award-winning game *BioShock*, released in 2007, delivered one of the most engrossing narratives in the history of interactive entertainment—the harrowing tale of an underwater city called Rapture, founded on utopian ideals, only to spiral into chaos as rampant genetic experimentation morphed the city's inhabitants into sociopathic brutes. Think *Atlas Shrugged* meets *28 Days Later* meets *The Abyss*.

Levine stressed the importance of creating roughly three layers of story that allow players to engage your narrative to whatever depth they desire. On the most superficial level, the player is made aware of some overarching objective—a bad guy to kill, a loved one to save, etc. Then you have the second level—narrative elements that help the player appreciate the basic nuances of the story's conflict and the motivations of the characters involved. On the third and final level, scattered across the environment is a novelistic level of detail players can investigate if they're hungry for more



narrative color—in *BioShock*'s case, reel-to-reel audio diaries left behind by the game's many characters. These Easter eggs reward the curiosity of players who might just end up writing a paper on the game for a college class or dissecting it on their blog like an episode of *Lost*.

So why bring up Levine's pyramidal approach to game narrative in a review of *Mirror's Edge*? Because it's the quality of that exceedingly precious third layer of game storytelling that determines which titles make a meaningful contribution to the ongoing cultural conversation, and which ones merely drive enough secondary sales to keep GameStop in business. *Mirror's Edge* offers a compelling gameplay experience but it's the provocative, level-three story that keeps your brain whirring as loudly as the Xbox 360's cooling fan, long after you've finished the game and powered down your console.

The game is set in a vast, conspicuously unnamed metropolis that could be anywhere in the world, except perhaps the U.K., given the perfectly sunny days and endless bright-blue skies stretching out overhead. But don't let the gorgeous weather fool you. The real clouds to worry about here are the invisible surveillance ones monitoring every last citizen's movements and communications. The specter of terrorism and civil unrest has opened a window for the government to establish a totalitarian regime under the auspices of homeland security. Mayor Callaghan is running for re-election and has no qualms about using fear as a means to keep his leash of influence cinched tightly around the electorate's neck.

Not everyone has bowed before such invasive governmental action. Dissenting factions exist, but they must now rely on "Runners"—nimble foot messengers who carry sensitive information swiftly across rooftops from one group to another. You play as one such Runner, Faith, a Eurasian female who looks like a cross between Aeon Flux and Sporty Spice. The man running against the incumbent mayor, a challenger who had stressed the need for reform, has been assassinated—and your police-officer sister, Kate, has been framed for the murder. It's up to you to uncover the real assassin and set things right.

While games like *Call of Duty 4* have dealt with the battlefield aspect of terrorism, *Mirror's Edge* is the first to examine the ramifications of domestic safeguarding, and how easily civil rights can be trampled under the auspices of security. Playing the game, you occasionally find yourself in elevators with level-three story delivered in scrolling messages on wall-mounted digital displays. The headline of one such news flash reads, "Avian Flu: Here to Stay?" Luckily for you, Mayor Callaghan is around to keep you safe.

The gameplay is built around parkour, the practice of traversing obstacles in urban environments with grace and shocking athleticism. Remember the scene early in 2006 Bond film *Casino Royale* where Daniel Craig pursues a man across a construction site in Madagascar—that's parkour. As you hop chain-link fences, slide under air ducts and leap across rooftops, you feel the physical impact of each of Faith's movements as she navigates the unforgiving concrete underfoot.

The game's visual presentation is absolutely stunning. While the husk of the city and the building interiors are a ghostly white, deeply saturated accents of orange and blue and green burst off the screen. Items you can interact with turn deep red as you approach. The games' colors are arresting, and yet it took me several hours to realize that the paintbox being used to dress up this savage comment on fear tactics and terrorism was quite simply the United States' color-coded Homeland Security Advisory System. Damn.

➥ This game was reviewed on a hi-def AOC 2230Fh gamer certified display

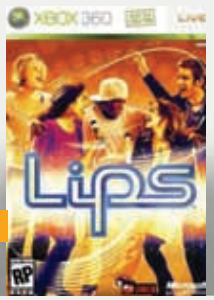
➥ JASON KILLINGSWORTH IS *PASTE*'S DEPUTY EDITOR AND GAMES EDITOR.

LEFT 4 DEAD

DEVELOPER: VALVE CORPORATION
PLATFORMS: XBOX 360, PC
Long live video games about the undead!

Everyone loves a good zombie movie. Trouble is, after the first time you're startled by some ghoulie unexpectedly punching through a door, the element of surprise begins to dull. The genius of *Left 4 Dead* is that anytime you load up one of the game's four scenarios, a clever AI program takes the director's chair, shuffling and remixing the scares each time you play. You never know when an undead horde will come racing down an alleyway at you. Taking their cues from modern zombie-movie classic *28 Days Later*, *Left 4 Dead*'s corpses attack like rabid animals, pouring forth from every direction in bloodthirsty packs. Luckily, you can bring three friends (and an armory's worth of firearms) along for the ride. Surviving an undead apocalypse is a team sport, and playing online with living human beings is where *Left 4 Dead* earns its keep. **ROBERT ASHLEY** **85**

Left 4 Dead



LIPS

DEVELOPER: INIS
PUBLISHER: MICROSOFT
PLATFORM: XBOX 360
How well do you know the songs on your iPod?

Lips, the new karaoke game from the makers of *Elite Beat Agents*, supplements its playlist with your personal MP3 collection. The game doesn't provide onscreen lyrics or pitch suggestions for the tunes you bring to the table, but still, the ability to "freestyle" songs from your private music stash is transformative, rendering irrelevant any complaints that the provided music (40 songs out of the box) is too mainstream. Don't like Lil Mama's "Lip Gloss" or "I'm Only Me When I'm With You" by Taylor Swift? Fine. Whip out your MP3 player, plug it in and show us what you got. *Lips* comes bundled with two handsome, motion sensitive wireless microphones that make it easy to drop in and out of play. As a jukebox, the game spins random tracks from its playlist and your MP3 player. When the mood takes you, simply snatch the mic from the coffee table and start singing. It's a casual approach to karaoke that makes *Lips* the ideal party favor for gamers who entertain. **GUS MASTRAPA** **80**

Paste recommends

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UNGLUED

BIG IN CAMBODIA

BY JASON LEAHEY ILLUSTRATION BY PIETARI POSTI

DEAR RICHARD MARX,

I am writing to let you know that you are absolutely huge in the nation of Cambodia. I mean you're a veritable titan. This is no small feat; popular song here is largely comprised of Khmer-language lost-love ballads with melodies as soft as wet bread and beats as compelling as a plastic fork. Their videos play loudly and incessantly on every bus line for hours and hours and hours. Khmer young and old, hip and bumpkin, lean forward, elbows on knees, and watch intently as the lyrics scroll across the bottom of the screen. Nary a word of English is heard. Except your words, Richard.

In the six weeks I have been here, I have heard "Right Here Waiting" multiple times, in multiple social situations, and in multiple forms. You might be saying, "Well, that's my biggest hit; it's no surprise it finds a home in the international soft-rock market." You might be saying, "'Right Here Waiting' is in every mid-level piano practice book printed since 1989, it was only a matter of time." And you'd be right, Richard, but in your ignorance and humility you are selling yourself short. Lest you think that the art of letters prompts me to embellish facts, let me state firmly that all of what follows is 100 percent truth.

The morning my lady and I left Phnom Penh for Siem Reap, I woke up with "Should've Known Better" flexing itself in my brain. There was no reason for it—my cassette of your debut is in a box in the States—and yet there I was, snarling to Shannon from the shower. Then, just because, we traded verses of "Right Here Waiting."

Two hours pass, we're on our way north, and what comes on the bus television? A fan-freaking-tastic cover of "Right Here Waiting" sung in English and Khmer, that's what. "Whatever it take," the man sings along with the karaoke prompt. "Oh! How my heart breaks?" Then, only one day later, we're in a café and it comes on again, this time a full-English cover sung bravely by a Khmer. Another week and a half passes, and we're having a drink when a Belgian woman at a nearby table starts in with her own rendition. We try to engage in a tête-à-tête over the long reach of your staff-writing arm, but the other table is confused. They've just arrived in town. They're just singing because your song popped into their heads apropos of nothing. All of this is the gospel truth.

I don't know just what it is about the Khmer experience that makes you so relatable. I don't think the national appetite for sad ballads is explanation enough. I wonder if the key is the combination of loss and patient waiting. If, in a country where every family includes the memory of a loved one stolen away by war and torture, there is deep resonance in the declaration, "Whatever it takes, or how my heart breaks, I will be right here waiting for you."

The point, Rick, is this: You're in the bloodstream here, part of the cultural compote of the moment. The people of this distant land do not merely enjoy your song; they are inspired to make it their own. I'd wager a lot of money on the bet that few people here know your name. And yet, you're as ubiquitous in Cambodia as 7-Eleven gas stations are at home. Cambodians count on you being there, and trust that when they need you, you will indeed be right there, waiting, for them.

Warm regards,
Jason Leahey

JASON LEAHEY IS AN AMERICAN WRITER LIVING AND WORKING IN CAMBODIA. HE CO-AUTHORS THE BLOG FORWARDINGADDRESSES.BLOGSPOT.COM.

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ASCAP EXPO

THE MUSIC CREATOR CONFERENCE

APRIL 23-25, 2009 Los Angeles, CA

Renaissance Hollywood Hotel

SUCCEEDING IN TODAY'S MUSIC BUSINESS DEPENDS ON CONNECTIONS

ASCAP's "I Create Music" EXPO connects you face to face with the world's leading songwriters, composers and industry experts, who are all part of ASCAP's network of committed music creators helping to guide those who are serious about their careers to greater success.

TAKE YOUR CAREER TO THE NEXT LEVEL

- Celebrity Q & A's
- Showcases and Performances
- Master Classes
- Attendee Song Feedback Panels
- Songwriting & Composing Workshops
- Networking Opportunities
- Publisher & Business Panels
- State-of-the-Art Technology Demos
- DIY Career Building Workshops
- Leading Music Industry Exhibitors

ONE-ON-ONE-SESSIONS

We are excited to again offer the tremendously popular One-on-One Sessions; a valuable opportunity to closely spend 15-minutes with a songwriter/composer or music industry executive. Register early because they fill up fast.

Registration is now open

Register early for the biggest discounts and find out how you can get connected at

WWW.ASCAP.COM/EXPO

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